



IN BRIEF...

Conflict management through culture and media

Many modern, violent conflicts are characterised by cultural oppression. In a society where diversity of opinion and expressions of culture exist side by side, there are also opportunities for resolving conflicts without resorting to violence. Consequently, Swedish culture and media development cooperation in conflict areas supports the growth of multicultural, stable and democratic societies.

How can people find out the truth during a violent conflict? How can they gain access to information that may be decisive to their lives and futures? Never is there so much propaganda as during wars and conflicts, never so many rumours. Violent conflicts create poverty on several levels and destroy a world that can take many, many years to rebuild. Respect for human rights – the right to life, freedom of expression and the various forms of development – is abandoned which causes hopelessness and hate.

For Swedish culture and media development cooperation, support to freedom of expression and diversity represents one approach to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

People who live in conflict areas are entitled to relevant information, freedom of expression, to exert influence and to be able to participate in society.

Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of cultural freedom, in other words the right to choose political, ethnic, religious or sexual identities without being exposed to oppression and discrimination. Policies such as ethnic cleansing and religious per-

secution are used to suppress cultural identities. Another method is excluding people from important parts of daily life such as education, public debate, health care, working life or political and cultural participation.

Culture and media support

Support to culture and media can contribute to diversity, democratisation and development on many levels:

- Culture and media strengthen people by providing them with access to knowledge, creativity, self-esteem and recognition.
- Culture and media provide vital arenas for the public discussions essential to democracy.
- People's opportunities to influence and participate in society are promoted by culture and media.
- Culture and media, which in different ways examine and comment on decision makers and power structures, contribute to the democratic process. People become aware of their rights and can demand accountability from those in power.
- A strong culture and media sector also promotes economic development.



PHOTO: CLOWNS WITHOUT BORDERS

Clowns without Borders perform in a refugee camp in Macedonia. Fire eating, acrobatics and pies in the face remind the children that camp life and conflict is not the only reality.

Conflict management

There are various dimensions to conflict management within Sida's development cooperation: working in a preventative manner in situations of rising tension, and promoting peaceful development, dialogue and security during and after open armed conflict.

A great deal of Sida's culture and media cooperation possesses a conflict prevention dimension. Inputs support freedom of expression in various ways as this freedom is a precondition for a

democratic society. A society characterised by broad participation and respect for basic human rights can manage conflicts using the spoken and written word, instead of resorting to violence.

Several of the culture and media inputs supported by Sida contribute to the psychosocial processing of trauma and create “spaces of normality” and humanity in extreme situations. Individuals and groups can, through discussion and counselling, deal with their trauma and contribute to changing attitudes and society.

Swedish culture and media support is primarily aimed at children, women, minority ethnic groups and other marginalized groups whose rights are often violated. Together these form the majority of the populations in Sida’s cooperating countries.

One key group for Swedish culture and media cooperation is culture workers and journalists. Their arenas of action are determined by legislation and culture and media infrastructures. Consequently, support to social structures is also vital.

Creating dialogue and security

Culture sector actors are important forces for dialogue creation in a society in crisis. The examples below show that these actors can discuss political issues and form opinion, as in Zimbabwe, or create respect and understanding between ethnic groups as in South Africa. Culture is also a source of inspiration, joy and courage for people living in difficult circumstances such as those currently prevailing in Palestine.

Journalists play a key role in democratisation processes. Media can assist in creating conflicts as well as resolving them. Conflict sensitive journalists and publicists do not spread rumours that could incite violence and do not set up one ethnic group against another. Support to professional journalism and publishing activities could be one path to conflict resolution and increased security. Support to legislation and structures that promote transparency, diversity and freedom of expression can increase stability in a society.

Sida’s conflict policy is based on

the idea that Sida should act in an impartial manner as concerns the parties to a conflict, but should not remain neutral on issues such as democracy, human rights and gender equality.

In Sweden’s Policy for Global Development from December 2003, the importance of identifying methods of conflict management is emphasised. Below are some examples of the design of support to media, literature, dramatic arts and cultural heritage with the aim of conflict management. This is not, however, an exhaustive list.

Examine, comment on and reflect: Media

Support for good journalistic practices in Palestine

Media that states the facts, illustrates attitudes and stops false rumours play a vital role during conflicts. Critical and professional media form an irreplaceable component of all democracies –



FOJO’s teacher, Mia Gröndahl, holds a workshop in photo journalism in Palestine.

unbiased and relevant information is essential if inhabitants are to participate and exert influence. In Palestine, journalism and media are currently a long way from this ideal. It is not uncommon for the authorities to interfere with the work of the media or for journalists to be threatened and arrested.

Since 1996, the Swedish Institute for the Further Education of Journalists, FOJO, has implemented Swedish support for journalism training in Palestine. Support has included journalism courses at Birzeit University on the West Bank, and training activities in Gaza. During this project (1996-2004), the major part of the Palestinian journalist corps has participated in training in subjects such as

press ethics, human rights and the nuts and bolts of media production.

It is vital to examine and comment on the effects of a conflict and its actors. However, in the long run it will also be necessary to investigate and describe other aspects of society. It is also important to be able to describe identities using terms other than the stereotypes created by conflict – for example to discuss family roles, professional identities and interests. So courses in subjects such as local journalism, school and environmental issues, consumer journalism and culture have also been held.

Freedom of expression in Southern Africa

Since 1992, the Media Institute of Southern Africa has developed into a respected and powerful actor for freedom of expression in Southern Africa. This organisation, currently operating in more than ten countries, is one of the most important champions of freedom of expression and democracy in the area and works through a wide media network.

MISA sounds the alarm when journalists are harassed, imprisoned or assaulted and runs campaigns for freedom of expression and information. It provides advisory services and financial support for journalists who are prosecuted. Most recently, it has been the turn of Zimbabwean journalists. They have received legal assistance from MISA, which has established a network of Zimbabwean lawyers who can, and will, defend journalists.

One of MISA’s objectives is also to improve the quality of media in Southern Africa. Methods utilised include awarding prizes for good journalism and establishing ethical codes of conduct for media. Another aim is to influence national legislation to promote freedom of expression and the press.

MISA also works for diversity in the radio and TV fields. Focus lies on supporting a transformation from government controlled broadcast media, which is common in Southern Africa, to public service, community media or privately owned structures.

Rapid support in conflict areas

Media are often in crisis in war and conflict areas, as a consequence

people do not gain access to true and relevant information. Media may contain a number of unsubstantiated rumours or even false information. At the same time, journalists are threatened, harassed or sometimes killed.

The international foundation International Media Support has developed various rapid mobilisation methods to support media in crisis areas. The aim is to support press freedom and enable local media to operate professional, objective journalism – even under war conditions. IMS is also working to establish guidelines for conflict journalism.

IMS initiates its activities by assessing the situation in the country/area and establishing what the local media needs to be able to function. Then the organisation designs its activities, often in cooperation with international, regional or local partners.

Inputs can be of a very practical nature: for example support for the purchase of equipment or alternative channels for production, printing, broadcasting or distribution. IMS also contributes professional advice on editorial decisions and brokers short-term cooperation with media in other countries.

However, IMS also examines whether the media themselves are part of the problem. In these cases efforts are aimed more at supporting objective reporting by advising local media or enabling exchange of experience with journalists from other conflict areas.

Sida takes decisions on support to IMS activities in different countries as and when conflicts occur.

Empowerment through literature *Children's literature in Palestine*

Since 1995, Sida has provided support to a children's literature programme in the West Bank/Gaza through Diakonia, a Christian NGO. The overall objective is to increase reading among Palestinian children. Their hope is that Palestinian children, who in their everyday lives are surrounded by destructive forces, can acquire positive inputs through literature. Children's books can help them process the trauma they experience, so

that they can grow up knowing that other ways of life exist.

During its almost ten year duration, this project has provided hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children with access to books of high quality. It has also trained authors and illustrators in the production of children's books, implemented extensive activities to promote reading and trained Palestinian teachers in how they can work with children's literature in school.

Diakonia has worked in close cooperation with authorities and organisations in the West Bank and in Gaza. Cooperating partners include the Palestinian Ministries of Culture and Education, the Tamer Institute for Community Education and UNRWA. In spite of the extensive material destruction in the country and an increasingly difficult security situation, the children's literature programme has, generally speaking, proceeded according to plan primarily thanks to the commitment of the Palestinians.

Raise your voice and take a stand: Dramatic arts

Dramatic art in Palestine

Since 1992, the Swedish University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre has provided support to dramatic arts in the West Bank/Gaza, especially concentrating on children and young people. During the relatively calm and hopeful period after the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the primary aim was to help to build up a Palestinian cultural infrastructure that would be an important part of an independent Palestinian state. However, since the Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in September 2000, dramatic arts projects have increasingly included psychosocial activities.

Many children live with deep trauma caused by the increasing violence and their severe poverty, and need help with the psychological processing of their experiences. Plays, drama training and video animation courses have proved to be one way of helping these children to talk about and work through their experiences. Girls especially have gained a unique place to express themselves through this project.

All support to the dramatic arts

has been channelled through Palestinian NGOs and independent theatre groups. Several of these theatre groups take up difficult subjects with the aim of creating debate and expanding the discussion field. For example the Fekra Art Institute theatre group set up a play entitled "Something's going on", which criticises corruption and highhanded methods in the Palestinian leadership.

The Ashtar Theatre Group runs a forum theatre for children where they improvise plays based on requests from the audience. They have taken up controversial subjects such as physical abuse in the family, incest and under-age marriage.

The increasingly difficult situation in Palestine has changed preconditions for cooperation. Theatre groups who could previously go on tour to various places have now been limited to their immediate neighbourhoods. It has, for example, been impossible for anyone to visit Gaza for long periods of time and lack of security is another recurring problem.

Critics seek new paths in Zimbabwe

Freedom of expression has been brutally limited by Robert Mugabe's government: independent newspapers have been closed while journalists and members of the opposition have been arrested and threatened. However, civil resistance is widespread: mass demonstrations against government policies, followed by mass arrests, are frequent. Since January 2001, development cooperation between the Zimbabwean Government and Sida has been terminated and support to the population is carried out via UN and NGOs.

Culture plays a central role in a state where media cannot operate freely. As it is difficult for the media to critically examine the government, critics often look for other channels to make their voices heard, for example theatre and music. Culture workers from Zimbabwe often cooperate across borders, which also makes it more difficult for the government to control them.

Sida supports theatre groups such as Rooftop (in Harare) and Amakhosi (in Bulawayo). These groups have set

up several socially critical plays with the intention of creating discussions on current issues. The theatre has provided a forum for discussion and dialogue. Before the presidential elections in March 2002 they launched a joint play entitled "Dare" (meeting place) to encourage people to go and vote. Several critical plays have gained considerable attention: they are filmed and shown both in Zimbabwe and in Southern Africa, via video and Internet. Through meetings and festivals, ideas and opinions are exchanged with representatives of neighbouring countries and the rest of the world.

Market Theatre – a voice against Apartheid

The Market Theatre in Johannesburg was well known internationally as early as the 1970s as a strong voice against Apartheid. Culture played a vital role during the struggle against oppression. It encouraged people of all colours to resist, gave expression to prevailing injustices and challenged those in power. Up until the fall of the Apartheid Regime, the Market Theatre was one of the few places in South Africa where people could socialise as equals irrespective of the colour of their skins. The ensemble and its audiences were racially mixed — revolutionary in a country whose very existence was based on the separation of races. The theatre became a place of resistance but also a forum for peaceful development as it presented opportunities for dialogue between different views. The fact that there were places like the Market Theatre was perhaps one of the preconditions that allowed the transformation of

South Africa to be about reconciliation and not violence. The theatre created an important training facility: the Market Theatre Laboratory, where young people primarily from the townships receive drama training and field drama teachers are taught how to work with amateur theatre. The theatre has received Swedish support since the 1980s, latterly via a culture fund over which Sweden and South Africa have equal influence. As the Market Theatre is now becoming a government financed institutional theatre, its need for foreign support is decreasing.

Recreating what the conflict destroyed: Cultural heritage

The history of the oppressed

Cultural symbols often become targets during conflicts. In the same fashion meeting places and environments which encourage alternatives are also attacked. Consequently, it has become extremely important that reconciliation activities take up the past. District Six was once a prosperous, multicultural district of Cape Town. However during the 1970s and 80s it was demolished and all the ethnic groups who had called it home were forced to move to "racially homogeneous" areas. However peoples' memories of the district remained and in 1992, the District Six Museum was founded in order to document the district's history. Today there are extensive archives including photos, stories, interviews, artefacts, musical recordings and films.

The Museum, which is intended to work for the interests of those who

were forcibly relocated and to tell their stories, will ensure that the Apartheid era's crimes will not be forgotten. However the Museum also has a symbolic value and shows what a multicultural South Africa could have been like, before Apartheid tore it apart. Swedish support to the District Six Museum has primarily been channelled via Malmö Museum.

Rebuilding Balkan cultural heritage

Systematic destruction of the cultural heritage of the opposite side was part and parcel of the conflict in the Balkans. Building up what has been destroyed can strengthen and unite people as well as returning their history and common memories to them.

The Cultural Heritage without Borders foundation, supported by Sida, is currently working with the restoration of Balkan buildings such as the National Museum in Sarajevo, traditional dwellings and mosques in Jajce and the monastery at Zavala in Bosnia. In addition, the foundation advises a cultural environment office in Kosovo. The aim of this office is to involve the local population in broadly based cooperation to preserve places of cultural value in the area, and while doing so create dialogue and an opportunity for reconciliation. The office operates restoration projects in Kosovo and also trains local builders, craftsmen and suppliers in traditional building methods. One important part of the restoration projects is to employ workers from the various ethnic groups in order to contribute to discussions across borders on the personal level as well.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on Sida's culture and media development cooperation:

Culture and Media Unit, Sida.
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Additional reading on Sida's conflict management activities

Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Violent Conflict, Sida 2003
Reflections on Development Cooperation and Violent Conflict, Sida 2003
Reconciliation – Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation, Sida 2003
Democratisation and Armed Conflict, Sida 2003
Conflict Management in Latin America, Sida 2003.

Internet links to culture and media cooperating partners:

Diakonia: www.diakonia.se
Theatre groups in Palestine:
www.ashtartheatre.org,
www.el-funoun.org,
www.inadtheater.org
Market Theatre: www.markettheatre.co.za
Music Crossroads: www.jmi.net
FOJO: www.fo.hik.se
MISA: www.misa.org
International Media Support: www.i-m-s.dk
District Six Museum: www.d6.co.za
Kulturav utan gränser: www.chwb.org

Reducing global poverty by half by 2015 is feasible. It calls for 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.



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