



Operating Concept

Sida Civil Society Center



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Background

This document describes SEKA's operating concept for Sida Civil Society Center. The operating concept serves as a bridge between SEKA's mission statement

“to create conditions in which poor and vulnerable people can live in peace and regain and maintain control over their lives”

and the Center's work plan, which is prepared for each fiscal year. The operating concept presents the Center's goals, points of departure, activities, target groups, and organisation.

Role of the Centre

Sida Civil Society Center (SCSC) was established in 2002 as a resource centre mainly for NGOs and popular movements, with a focus on the role of civil society in developmental issues. In terms of organisation, the center is part of SEKA – Sida's Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations and Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict Management. The Center was established because the Swedish government and Swedish civil society have a joint interest in achieving the highest quality possible in programmes of development cooperation.

Sida's ambition is that SCSC should offer a transparent, common platform for developing ideas and methods. SCSC shall operate in a climate of dialogue in which all types of questions can be discussed freely and without bias. Initiatives for discussions may come from the organisations or Sida. The common platform is underpinned by mutual respect for the various roles of the organisations and Sida.

Objective

SCSCs objective is *to contribute to capacity development of Civil Society's organisations in development cooperation.*

The Center has two tasks:

- A. to support the capacity development activities of the organisations.
- B. to function as an arena for debate on development cooperation in a civil society perspective. One important task is therefore to identify and offer opportunities to discuss issues related to development cooperation in the future. The Center offers a meeting place where practitioners and academics can meet and learn from each other.

Capacity development refers to the development of knowledge and expertise in individuals and organisations working towards a common objective. The aim is

to improve the organisations' efficiency and sustainability in relation to their context and objectives, and to strengthen their identity, skills, and ability to communicate and learn.

Target group

Sweden has about fifty national organisations that work full-time or part-time with international development cooperation in collaboration with Sida. They constitute, or are a part of, some of the umbrella organisations that have general agreements with Sida. These organisations are the primary target group of the Center's courses and programmes. The secondary target group consists of about 500 small and local organisations and associations.

Although Swedish organisations are the primary target group, the overall objective is to strengthen the organisations in the partner countries.

Where functioning as an arena is concerned (task B above), the target group is broader. The Center as a meeting place for discussions on the future encompasses all forums and participants in the debate. In addition to organisations and popular movements, this includes the research community, business sector, mass media, and government agencies at both national and local level.

Strategic points of departure



A better world without poverty

Sweden's *Policy for Global Development/PGU* and Sida's *Perspectives on Poverty* describe the overriding objectives for the Center. Other documents on which activities at the Center are based are Sida's *Field Vision*, which has a global perspective as its point of departure in which partner countries have a greater influence over Sida's activities, as well as *Sida's Policy for Civil Society* and *Sida's Policy for Capacity Development*. These documents, together with the policy documents of Swedish NGOs and the official report that preceded the formation of the Center, provide guidance for the design of activities. Activities shall be characterised by a clear "global" perspective.

Significance of civil society

SCSC's activities are based on Sida's view of civil society as a significant stakeholder in development cooperation. Civil society refers to the arena – separate from the central government, the market and individual households – in which citizens can organise and act together for common interests.

A discussion of the concept of civil society shows that it can also serve destructive purposes, but at best, it can help poor people to escape from poverty and improve their living conditions.

Civil society can represent and channel their interests, mobilise popular involvement, act as a lobbyist and offer services. It can also provide support for the establishment of democratic social systems through democratic education and training. SCSC's operations aim to actively support the organisations of civil society in their efforts to teach, interact and exert an influence.

A learning organisation

Sida Civil Society Center has the ambition to be a learning organisation with a basic view of humankind as curious, accountable and innovative, and with a propensity to evolve. This view of knowledge assumes that knowledge is acquired, created in a social context and accumulated through reflection on experience. A learning process cannot be predicted or controlled in detail. Learning is complex and requires trust and confidence. This view of learning is the basis of the methods used at the Center.¹

An organisation is an evolving organism – it is greater than the sum of the individuals working for it. This concept forms the basis of activities and the Center as an organisation. The subject areas at the Center describe the different entry points to the role of civil society in development cooperation. The foundation is a dialogue-based view of learning, change and development, in which communication is essential. A key issue for the Center is to establish and maintain clear communications channels internally at the Center and Sida, and externally with organisations and regional and local stakeholders.²

¹ See "Sida is learning" and the project report from the learning strategy project, Sida PEO/IKU 2004

² See SCSC's communication plan

Activities



Needs-based activities

Activities at SCSC are needs-based. These needs are surveyed with the aid of the Swedish organisations and Sida, the Center's advisory board or other national and international sources.

Methods for surveying needs can vary; for example through seminars at the Center together with the organisations, in the field where practitioners and researchers are invited to discussions, through the quarterly and annual reviews that SEKA's programme officers carry out together with the umbrella organisations, or in other ways.

Through the continuous dialogue with the various stakeholders, contribution can be identified, planned and carried out in consultation with the organisations and the programme officers at the Center. Conditions for this are regulated in the financial conditions drawn up at the Center.³

Flexible working methods

To achieve the Center's objective SCSC uses a variety of methods, including seminars, projects, courses and training programmes. The view of learning described above shall permeate all activities at the Center.

³ See Economic conditions for NGOs collaboration with Sida Civil Society Centre

1. A meeting place for different parties

SCSC offers a meeting place for NGOs and Sida, workers and researchers. Development-related problems are discussed at **seminars** and in other ways. The Center and its staff have the important task of monitoring trends and flows in different sectors and of disseminating this knowledge in an interesting and easily accessible way. The Center's newsletter and its seminar activities serve as channels for disseminating this knowledge.

2. A centre for methods development

In a dialogue with Sida's department for policy and Methodology and other departments, SCSC monitors and analyses Swedish and international theories and knowledge of civil society and its role in development cooperation. These theories are made concrete, defined, and converted into methods and tools, mainly in the form of **projects**, for which the Center serves as an engine. The Center's library has a key role as an information centre.

3. A resource for skills enhancement and change

SCSC holds courses **and programmes** for and together with Swedish non-government organisations and supports their efforts to effect change.

The Center works with courses in various ways:

- a) *in-house courses, which can be developed in cooperation with one or more organisations*
- b) *organisation-specific courses*

Organisation



Advisory board

Sida Civil Society Center has an advisory board. The board consists of eleven people who come from Swedish organisations active in the field of development cooperation, from other government agencies, and from the research community. The advisory board, which meets about four times a year, has an advisory function for the Center and shall help to ensure that the Center's activities are planned on the basis of important changes and needs in the outside world.

Members of the advisory board are appointed for a two-year term. They are selected on the basis of their personal capacity and shall not be regarded as representatives of their organisations or institutions.⁴

The Center

Activities are planned with the aid of the survey of needs described above as a starting point. Working in project form is used as much as possible. Prior to each new calendar year a work plan is prepared in which relevant projects are identified and defined. The contents of activities are mainly planned in the programme group, which consists of programme officers, project managers, training officers, the librarian, the Center's administrator and the head of the Center.

⁴ See PM for the SCSC advisory board

Various forms of temporary reinforcements for specific subject areas are linked to the programme group based on needs, for example expertise from Sida's sector departments, the academic community or from independent consultants.

A number of administrative functions support the Center activities: the library, IT support, course administration and the residential course centre. The administrative group handles questions related to the various support functions and the development of these functions. All personnel at the Center attend the staff meeting, where they discuss issues related to all parts of the Center's activities. The subjects taken up at the meetings are prepared in the programme group or administrative group.⁵

⁵ See Organisation chart for SCSC

Sida Civil Society Center

– where good ideas meet

Sida Civil Society Center in Härnösand was started in 2002 as a meeting place for NGOs and popular movements whose activities are focus on the role of civilian society in development.

The center's guest-house

As a course participant you are more than welcome to stay at the Center's guest-house Lönnebo which is situated beside the main building. Lönnebo has 50 single rooms which also can be used as double rooms if necessary. Every room has it's own bathroom. In the guest-house there is a spacious kitchen open to all guests where breakfast is served. There is a TV room, sauna, laundry room and common rooms. There are also two double rooms with their own kitchenettes. Sheets and towels are supplied by the guest-house. All rooms have been adapted for use by a disabled persons.



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.



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