

Sweden recognizes the vital contribution of civil society in the areas of sustainable development, human rights, policy making, and social services. Sweden is therefore committed to creating an enabling environment for civil society, fostering a vibrant and pluralistic civil society, and also supporting civil society as an integrated part of support toward other development objectives.

Sida's Civil Society Unit has developed a guidance to assist Sida staff to engage with and support civil society. The guiding principles may be put into practice while drafting a country strategy/a strategy for CSO support and while operationalizing strategies but may also be useful for the preparation of a dialogue, a speech, a regular meeting with a partner, or while identifying dialogue topics during an assessment process, or planning an evaluation. The guidance is based on international commitments on aid and development effectiveness, good practice and Sida's interpretation of effective partnerships with civil society.

Sida puts forward five principles to assist Sida staff. The five principles are in short:

1. SIDA SHOULD EXPLORE THE VARIOUS ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITHIN THEIR CONTEXT

The local context and local priorities should be the starting point. It is important to explore and understand the roles civil society organizations can play, such as collective voices, actors for social inclusion, or providers of services. Sida's support needs to be tailored to what roles civil society organizations are to play and to the degrees to which their environment is enabling or restricting their work.

"With a new bottom-up and collective approach towards results both Sida and our partners have gotten a clearer understanding of the emerging context, theory of change and joint results and impact in different areas."

Anette Widholm-Bolme, formerly program manager of the Embassy of Sweden in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

2. SIDA SHOULD STRIVE TO SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY IN ITS OWN RIGHT

Sida should support a pluralistic and rights-based civil society as an objective in itself in addition to supporting individual CSOs with respect for their independence and right of initiative. The rationale behind supporting civil society as an objective in itself derives from the understanding that a strong, independent civil society is an essential part of a democratic society and is key to inclusive and sustainable development.

"Our relations have developed into true partnerships, a 'win-win' balance between supporting civil society in its own right and achieving our strategic objectives."

Louise Bermsjö, program manager of the Embassy of Sweden in Nairobi.

3. SIDA SHOULD PROVIDE AID AND DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Donors' requirements can have significant effects on the identity and legitimacy of CSOs and their effectiveness. Sida should strive to use more coordinated and harmonized support mechanisms that align to and strengthen CSO ownership and CSOs' development effectiveness.

"Thanks to our core support the Sarajevo Open Center could seize emerging political and legislative opportunities and actually succeeded in shifting norms with regards to LGBTI issues."

Pia Hallonsten, then program manager of the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

4. SIDA SHOULD SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS' EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS, INCLUDING THEIR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CSOs are working to strengthen their own transparency, legitimacy and accountability by among other things, improving the coordination of their activities and the public reporting on their activities. Transparent and accountable CSOs tend to be more effective and contribute to better development outcomes.

“We truly believe in and consistently use demand driven programming to ensure development effectiveness. We do this by bringing more voices into our agency, which in turn increases the trust that others have in our agency and work and reinforces the relationships and collaboration that drives our collective success.”

Perry Maddox, CEO, Restless Development.

5. SIDA SHOULD ENGAGE IN CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Establishing fora for regular dialogues with civil society provides a way for donors to systematically tap into CSOs knowledge and expertise, helps identify common ground for collaboration, and promotes trust and mutual accountability.

“Dialogue is ongoing with a high number of different actors on different issues, including through joint field visits. Thanks to these opportunities, we improve our mutual knowledge and understanding of local realities and our different roles in contributing to progress.”

Martin Hessel, Head of development cooperation, Embassy of Sweden in Guatemala.