



# Strategy for support via Swedish civil society organisations for the period 2016–2022



**Government Offices of Sweden**  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

# Direction

The purpose of activities within the framework of the strategy is to support the development towards a vibrant and pluralistic civil society in developing countries, that operates from a rights perspective in order to improve living conditions for people living in poverty, in all of its dimensions, to increase respect for human rights and to promote global sustainable development.

The strategy applies during the period 2016–2022 and covers the funds allocated in the appropriation directions of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for each budget year.

The strategy is expected to contribute to (i) strengthened capacity among civil society actors in developing countries, and (ii) a more enabling environment for civil society organisations in developing countries:

## **1. Strengthened capacity within civil society in developing countries to contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries**

Strengthened capacity among civil society organisations in developing countries reinforces civil society's contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable changes to the living conditions of people living in poverty. Strengthened capacity is expected to lead to:

- Increased impact of the rights perspective in the work of civil society organisations and strengthened ability of civil society to represent – and act in close collaboration with – people living in poverty.
- Greater awareness, engagement and capacity among people living in poverty, enabling them to work for democracy and to organise in order to assert their human rights.

# Activities

- Increased diversity within civil society in developing countries that represents and/or acts for the benefit of people living in poverty.
- Greater understanding and engagement in civil society in developing countries for global development and sustainability, and strengthened advocacy for these matters vis-à-vis decision-makers.
- Established and/or strengthened dialogue mechanisms and meeting places in developing countries for collaboration within civil society and between civil society and other development actors.
- Improved aid- and development-effectiveness in civil society support.

## 2. Promoting an enabling environment for civil society organisations in developing countries

An environment in which human rights are respected is crucial to enable civil society organisations in developing countries to operate as independent development actors in their own right, and for collaboration between civil society and other relevant actors working for sustainable and peaceful democratic development. The support is expected to contribute to:

- Increased opportunities for civil society to promote an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries.

Civil society has a key role to play in poverty reduction and a particular relevance for and potential to contribute to democratic development and greater respect for human rights in developing countries. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can create awareness of individuals' rights, mobilise people and strengthen their capacity to assert their rights, but also offer community services themselves when states do not. Organisations also have an important role in making proposals, shaping opinions and acting as a voice to influence the public and decision-makers. In this respect, civil society has a responsibility to represent and/or act for the benefit of groups and individuals who are discriminated against, marginalised, threatened and/or live in other dimensions of poverty. CSOs also play a decisive role in peace- and state-building.

The motivation for the strategy is that a vibrant, pluralistic civil society that works from a rights perspective is crucial for democratisation, poverty reduction, gender equality and equitable and sustainable global development. As opinion-makers and collective

voices, CSOs fulfil an important function by making proposals, exercising scrutiny and demanding accountability. They also meet essential needs for community services and can act as important bridge-builders in relation to other democratisation actors. CSOs' ability to operate at local levels and close to people living in poverty and repression enables them to assist people living in poverty and facing discrimination to influence their living conditions and to exert influence in political processes and decisions. The shrinking space for civil society in many parts of the world makes it especially important to stand up for the need to have a strong civil society and contribute to its capacity development.

The Swedish tradition of an independent civil society rooted in popular movements has particular potential through its long-term engagement to support the building of democratic CSOs in developing countries. Support to civil society in developing countries will be provided mainly through contributions to the development cooperation of Swedish CSOs. These

organisations have responsibility for the design, implementation and follow-up of activities. Sida has a responsibility to manage the operations through guidelines and regular follow-up measures to ensure that the strategy is implemented in a relevant and efficient manner. This management should be designed in such a way that it promotes civil society support that is flexible, innovative and effective in terms of aid and development. Support should be provided following an application procedure based on rules and criteria designed and approved by Sida. Sida should also encourage actors within the strategy to diversify their financing, for example by offering to fund the share that CSOs must provide themselves when receiving support from the European Commission.

Support to civil society in developing countries is not limited to individual countries or sectors, beyond what is stated in the OECD/DAC guidelines on what can be classified as aid.

The services of benefit to the community that are organised by CSOs within the framework of the strategy must be based on efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Policy for Global Development, with its two perspectives – the rights perspective and the perspective of poor people on development. This means that work should be conducted from a rights perspective, which strengthens the rights-holders' capacity to assert their rights and does not mean that the State neglects to fulfil its obligations to the citizens. The work should be based on a rights perspective also in the sense that it should be permeated by the four principles of participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency. Support should only be given to organisations with democratic working methods and internal structures that reflect gender and social equality, including in management, ensuring that organisations work and act with legitimacy and representativeness, and in accordance with the UN human rights principles, international humanitarian law and decisions taken by the UN Security Council.

Receiving support requires that CSOs act with legitimacy in relation to individuals and groups that are discriminated against, marginalised and/or live in poverty. This could mean that marginalised groups are included in the organisations' internal structure and involved in key decisions. Strengthened internal democracy is central.

The strategy will promote participation of a variety and breadth of organisations in terms of thematic skills, identity and direction, both in developing countries and in Sweden. Both new and established CSOs will be considered. Both formal CSOs and informal actors, such as networks, will be eligible for support. As regards actors in Sweden, special attention should be given to those that already play an important role in development, but new actors with the potential to play a more significant role within the framework of development cooperation should also be considered. Small-scale activities should not be an obstacle to being considered for support, whether in developing countries or in Sweden. Activities in repressive environments should also be

included in the strategy. Both groups and individuals within civil society, including human rights defenders, who live under threats and restrictions, are in particular need of support. Sida should be able to facilitate the work of Swedish CSOs to support vulnerable CSOs and/or informal actors, for example through risk-sharing.

Aid and development effectiveness should permeate all activities within the strategy. The principles of aid effectiveness, including the Istanbul Principles, are to be applied by all actors receiving and channelling Swedish development assistance, including Swedish CSOs. In this context, Sida will support Swedish CSOs' efforts to work in a harmonised manner with other actors, in order to coordinate demands on partner organisations from the donor community, e.g. with regard to planning, reporting, audits and country visits. With the purpose to increase civil society's own aid and development effectiveness, Sida will also pay attention to and engage in dialogue with Swedish CSOs about their

participation in initiatives with civil society actors at international level.

Coordination and collaboration should take place with activities financed by other strategies in order to achieve synergies, avoid overlap and ensure that relevant and important activities in the area between two strategies do not end up without financing. This is particularly relevant in relation to the humanitarian support. Coordination and collaboration can take place at country level, in dialogue with missions abroad and, where appropriate, at global level. Coordination and collaboration should be carried out on the basis of local needs, taking into account the specific context and conditions of the activities in question.

The organisations that receive support from the strategy must also report their data to Sida's CSO database and, eventually, to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

Of the activities conducted by Swedish CSOs with support from the strategy, (at least) 10 per cent must be financed

by the organisations with which Sida has an agreement, and (at least) 5 per cent with the funds that are sub-granted to another Swedish organisation.

### **Area 1 – Strengthened capacity among civil society actors in developing countries**

A common problem in civil societies in developing countries is that groups and organisations with the potential to contribute to democratic development and respect for and promotion of human rights have weak thematic, organisational and financial capacity and therefore do not gain traction.

Activities within the strategy should therefore help strengthen organisations internally within this area and thus contribute to improving their prospects of advocacy, influencing decision-makers, providing service delivery to communities, etc. This is expected to result in increased insight into, influence over and accountability within decision-making processes concerning the civil, political, social, economic and/or cultural human rights of people living in poverty.

In order to ensure capacity to manage development grants among CSOs in developing countries, it is important that they are supported in their efforts to reach a level of good administrative capacity as well as to establish routines for planning, implementation, follow-up and reporting of results in adequate and transparent ways.

Capacity development should be based on the already existing roles taken by partner organisations. The organisations that work on advocacy are expected, through the support, to strengthen their knowledge and capacity to conduct advocacy, access information, exert influence and demand accountability in decision-making processes. This includes being able to participate in specialised policy dialogues with governments, political parties and other relevant actors to actively participate in existing networks and build new ones where needed, and to communicate well with the public. Ultimately, the increased capacity among civil society actors is also expected to contribute to greater knowledge, engagement and capacity

among people living in poverty. In the same way, the civil society actors working as suppliers and organisers of services that are of benefit to society are expected to become stronger and more effective in this role. Civil society's role as organiser of community services is particularly relevant in contexts where the social infrastructure is weak.

A starting point for all activities is the rights perspective. The individuals that civil society works for and with are in many cases unaware of their human rights. Therefore, to be able to take part in society and influence their lives, people need both access to basic community services and knowledge about their rights.

Support should thus be directed at strengthening opportunities for groups and individuals to assert their rights themselves and influence their living conditions. Support should go to activities where there is a clear link to increasing respect for individuals' civil, political, social, economic and/or cultural human rights and that reduce poverty, including by enhancing

democratisation efforts. The activities that receive support should also be permeated by the four principles of the rights perspective, which support individuals' empowerment and improve organisations' opportunities to act with legitimacy and represent their constituencies. An important starting point is therefore to pay attention to women's participation and influence, representation and inclusion. Organisations should also be supported to gain greater knowledge of the rights perspective, the international human rights system and the legal and regulatory framework for these rights.

With the aim of promoting a greater understanding of global development and sustainability issues affecting people living in poverty, and of strengthening advocacy work for this vis-à-vis decision-makers at global, regional, national and local level, it must be possible to finance activities in support of Swedish CSOs' advocacy work outside Sweden.

## **Area 2 – Promoting an enabling environment**

The importance of civil society for sustainable and inclusive development is now widely accepted, and the rights and freedoms that have a bearing on civil society are part of the international framework for human rights. Despite this, opportunities for civil society to act have been limited through restrictive legislation in a large number of countries in recent years. Many partner organisations have also been subjected to threats and pressure that have limited their work; some have even had to discontinue their activities. This applies in particular to organisations working on human rights and democratisation. There is nothing to indicate that the negative trend will be reversed in the coming years.

Therefore, it is imperative to continue the work for an enabling environment for civil society. Promoting an enabling environment for CSOs as independent development actors in their own right is important in itself, but it is also an essential element in creating conditions for effective aid.

An enabling environment for CSOs means, among other things, that there is a legal framework making it possible for civil society to operate freely, and that there is actual scope and opportunity to influence decision-makers.

There is also a need for greater collaboration both within civil society and between civil society and other actors. It is necessary to strengthen 'bridge-builders' and meeting places for civil society as a whole, rather than just individual organisations. Greater collaboration with government and public institutions – as long as it takes place with respect for civil society's independence – is a prerequisite for functioning democratic processes. Collaboration with the political parties in the partner countries also plays an important role. A strong civil society can, in the long run, strengthen political parties and the democratic party system. One way of promoting collaboration can be to create or develop arenas or mechanisms for mobilisation, organisation, collaboration, dialogue and/or negotiations between actors from civil society, state and/or markets.

Support through civil society should help to highlight and strengthen the link between conflict prevention and development, and set out requirements for both development actors and the governments of fragile states to work on conflict prevention.

Support within the framework of the strategy can furthermore be provided to support international CSOs and Sida's international engagement in matters concerning civil society and its role in development. This kind of support should be based on local ownership and take account of existing coordination and organisation forms. For example, this can apply to contributions aimed at enhancing aid and development effectiveness within civil society. It could also concern support to policy and methods development, and analysis of how changes in the rest of the world affect civil society, how civil society contributes to development, and how civil society should be supported to make use of its full potential.

# Follow-up

Follow-up procedures are outlined in the Government's guidelines for strategies. All activities within the framework of the strategy are to be monitored continuously. Evaluation is to be seen as an integral part of continual follow-up and is to be conducted when necessary. Various methods of results monitoring are to be applied, using both qualitative and quantitative results information. A balance should be sought between short-term and long-term results in the portfolio of contributions to ensure that aid contributes to equitable and sustainable development in Sweden's partner countries.



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