

NORAD –

HOW TO DEAL WITH

DIRECT SUPPORT

TO CIVIL SOCIETY



NORAD

DIREKTORATET FOR
UTVIKLINGSSAMARBEID
NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



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Introduction

A democratic development that benefits the majority of the population requires the active participation from a diversified civil society. Civil society actors can strengthen the voices of the poor, empower them and enhance popular participation in development processes. They may serve as a corrective to government policies and offer alternative development strategies. Civil society may also enhance and contribute to the development efforts of the state.

The state, the private sector and civil society are the main arenas of development. NORAD will relate to all three of these based on an analysis of the situation in each partner country. The relationship to civil society will partly be through Norwegian and international organisations and in some cases direct to national organisations through our embassies.

This position paper deals mainly with the direct relationship and the support through and to civil societies in our main and other partner countries. Its aim is to highlight NORAD positions on direct support, and to point to challenges in the development of the direct support port-



The Community Voice is a small local newspaper which is published in the poor region Kenya in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. The newspaper writes about national discussions on a local level that concerns the poor citizens. A group of enthusiastic young people does everything from writing to layout and distribution of the paper.

folios. Support through Norwegian and international civil society actors is regulated through separate guidelines.

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What is civil society?

There are a number of definitions of civil society, ranging from a *set of values, a network of organisations, a space for action, a historical moment and an antidote to the state*. As a working definition that has practical purposes for our development work, we define civil society as:

- The formal and informal organisations and associations that operate in the space between the family and the state. These organisations are not controlled or owned by the state, and primarily operate on a not-for-profit base.
- An arena for civil society actors and their relationships with other actors like the state and the private sector. This space and arena will be shaped by its surroundings, including the legal framework under which a civil society operates.

It is important to note that NGOs, usually referred to as established organisations involved in development and advocacy activities, are part of civil society, but do not constitute civil society itself. Our definition is much broader, and may include organisations and structures like trade unions, churches, traditional leaders, self-help groups, professional and academic institutions, cultural associations, religious groups, independent media institutions and other. Civil societies will consist of both formal and informal structures, and it will change over time – as societies themselves change.

It is important to have knowledge and awareness about the complexity of civil societies in our partner countries. This does not mean that all organisations will be eligible for support. Parts of civil society may be seen as counter-productive to development efforts, other parts may be irrelevant

and other parts again will be too politically biased. As civil societies in most countries will comprise a number of different organisations with varied historical and motivational backgrounds, civil society will represent different values and belief systems. As such, one cannot automatically equate civil society to a specific set of values, as defined for instance in international human rights instruments or agreed development strategies.



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The analysis of civil society

NORAD's strategy for 2000-2005 – *NORAD invests in the future* – emphasises the need for sound analyses as a basis for choice of priority areas and working methods. As conditions vary greatly from country to country, it is imperative that such analyses are country specific and that their level of ambition reflect our involvement in the country. An analysis of civil society may include issues like:

- the main determinants for the shape and scope of civil society
 - the present political environment for civil society
 - the main issues involving civil society
 - how these issues relate to the policy agenda of authorities and donors
 - the relevance of these issues for the common citizen
 - the arenas of civil society deliberations and co-operation
- the arenas of interaction between civil society, state, and/or the private sector
 - the main categories of civil society actors
 - the main characteristics of civil society actors:
 - their driving forces, values, constituencies, relationships and networks, legitimacy, accountability and local resource base
 - their geographical dispersion and thematic emphasis
 - their roles in social mobilisation, mutual help, advocacy, policy development and social development
 - possible roles in conflict resolution and prevention, both nationally and regionally
 - links between areas of operation and Norwegian strategies and areas of support



Representatives from the woman's trade union, The Senior Citizens' Welfare Association (SCWA), in discussion with women from the village Gujarat in India.

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Roles and goals

The roles of civil society will vary from country to country, but the roles of actors eligible for Norwegian support may include:

- promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms, participation and democratic cultures
- voicing the interest of marginalized groups of society and fighting the feeling of powerlessness among the poor
- advocacy of gender equality and the importance of women's participation in decision making and development
- empowerment of local groups and communities, including their struggle for social development and the fight against HIV/AIDS
- building social capital – the ability of people to act in a collective manner

- providing arenas for training in democracy and participatory development
- offering alternative and improved development strategies and methodologies
- enhancing and complementing government development efforts
- enhancing the dialogue between political, social and economic actors in development
- contributing to peaceful prevention and resolution of conflict

All of the above may be important contributions in the fight against poverty, and as such be part of the goals for civil society support in any given country. In addition, direct support to civil society actors has added value for the development processes in general and the work of embassies in particular as:

- it provides links to a broader section of dialogue- and co-operative partners, and may contribute to the development of country strategies and common goals and visions
- it provides channels of information and insight in addition to established government and private sector contacts
- it contributes to the establishment and maintenance of links to the local level – links that are often lost in the sector-wide approaches
- it promotes development activities and actors that may be complementary and have additional values to government support and as such contribute to fulfilment of country strategies and other strategic documents



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Main principles for the support

An active relationship to civil society in a partner country does not necessarily imply direct funding of organisations. It may be through the support of Norwegian or international organisations, and it may be in forms other than financial support. Civil society actors may also be of use to the embassies as resource persons in different capacities as consultants, trainers etc. These options should always be kept open when considering direct support.

When, based on an analysis of the situation, direct support to civil organisations is chosen, the following principles should be laid down:

- a) The direct support should enhance the role of civil society actors as spelled out in point 4, and should enhance the development of a diversified and representative civil society.
- b) The direct support should contribute to the achievement of the overall objectives of Norwegian development co-operation and international development goals.
- c) In **main partner** countries, support should be given to areas of development that are within the agreed coun-

try strategies and other strategic documents like PRSPs, and thus be an integrated part of the support to the country. The support should be given in openness with the government and should not have a form that damages the long term relationship with the partner country. The roles of civil society (for instance discussions on public/private mix and their participation in sector programmes) should be an integrated part of our dialogue with the government.

- d) In **other partner** countries, direct support may be directed towards more specific development goals. This may be particularly true for countries in transition and countries in conflict.
- e) Support may be given direct to individual organisations, but it should be considered if is possible and/or desirable to channel the support through sector programmes, trust funds or umbrella organisations.
- f) Rather than just supporting projects, the support should try to capture and strengthen the streams of interventions that are rooted in civil society itself. The support should aim to reach be-

yond the traditional development NGOs and reach a representative range of civil society, with institutional development as a key concern.

- g) The support should be based on the mobilisation of various forms of national and local resources, and the issue of donor dependency should be of concern.
- h) Support should aim at strengthening an enabling environment that allows civil society to grow, prosper and participate constructively.

In some instances, direct Norwegian support to civil society actors may be seen as controversial and difficult by the government in a partner country. This may even be the case when the support is to promote universally accepted human rights standards ratified by both governments. In such cases it may be necessary to find more efficient ways to pursue these goals.

In other instances, political circumstances make it difficult to establish regular government-to-government programmes, and civil society support may in such cases provide an alternative option.

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Co-ordination with other donors

The majority of donors support civil organisations originating in their home countries, and most also have facilities for giving direct support in partner countries. The scope and structure of the support may vary, but most donors assume that civil society plays (or should play) crucial roles in national and local development processes. Donor interaction with, and support to, civil society actors in partner countries is increasing.

This makes donor co-ordination crucial. It should include the following aspects:

- to promote a critical view to donors' support and ensure that the common contribution does not result in exaggerated social or political engineering that lacks a popular basis
- that donors are sensitive to the diverse local and national agendas which are not necessarily the same agendas as the donors
- to look beyond the formal development and advocacy NGOs and find ways of identifying and supporting the more informal civil society that is of importance for the development of social capital and indigenous development agendas
- common learning and policy discussions and development
- common discussions linking national development and/or reform processes (PRSP, local government reform, improved financial management, anti corruption strategies) to the role of civil society
- possible identification of programs for joint donor funding
- exploration of the roles of regional organisations and networks
- discussions on the effects of donor funding on civil society, for instance accountability and competition for (scarce) human resources
- to ensure that activities supported are compatible with overall strategies and developments in the partner country and/or international human rights standards
- exchange of information and experiences to promote transparency and ensure that genuine and honest actors who deliver development results are the ones being supported
- to develop basic criteria and requirements (including agreements, reporting routines, accountability and salary levels) that are more streamlined and thus easier to relate to for the civil organisations
- core support versus earmarked (project) support

Donor co-ordination should always be a step towards greater recipient responsibility.

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The role of Norwegian organisation

As civil society has become more important on the development agenda, increased emphasis has been given to the role of Norwegian organisations in strengthening the role of civil societies in developing countries. The rationale is that some of the experiences of Norwegian voluntary actors may be transferable and useful to voluntary actors in partner countries. As like-minded, the Norwegian voluntary actors are considered to have a comparative advantage compared to the competence and capacity of an embassy, particularly in the field of competence -and institution building.

When this is the case and when a Norwegian voluntary actor has the needed national and thematic competence, they can be efficient allies in Norway's efforts to reach national and international development goals. They also play an important role in Norway in informing the public and mobilising popular support and international solidarity.

The use of Norwegian voluntary actors as intermediaries can be of particular importance in conflict-prone areas where people's link to foreign actors, or their pre-



The gender perspective is now integrated into almost all development programs.

sence, can provide some protection. Some Norwegian voluntary actors can play a role in peace and reconciliation efforts at local and national levels.

There will, however, be considerable variation in the Norwegian voluntary actors' competence, capacity and policy- and pro-

gramme coherence at country level. Civil society actors in Norway's partner countries will also have varying institutional strength and experience. Civil society actors' needs for support from Norwegian voluntary actors over and above financial support, will thus vary. Reserve and caution should be applied by NORAD to pre-

vent Norwegian voluntary partners to turn their efforts to areas where funding is available but where their contribution will be marginal due to lack of experience or competence. Norwegian actors as an intermediary link between donor and recipient may represent additional costs and bureaucracy, with “transaction costs” that may be worthwhile or may not.

Other reasons for considering direct support may be:

- Direct support from an embassy will more easily be in line with country strategies and other strategic documents, and thus better co-ordinated with partner countries and other donors.
- Direct support puts embassies in an immediate interaction with civil society that easily creates contacts and links that are valuable for the overall work of an embassy .

When developing the direct support portfolios, the possibility and/or desirability of channelling the support through Norwegian organisations should be considered. In this assessment, it is important to keep

the long term perspective in mind, and not only the immediate need for project results and utilisation of funds.

In many countries, the Norwegian organisations have developed extensive networks, and it is a challenge for the embassies to use this network of contacts more extensively. This is a particular challenge in countries where the embassy has little or no direct support to civil organisations. In all countries where Norwegian organisations are active, the embassies are to maintain regular contact, at least on a quarterly basis, with the organisations. Likewise, the organisations are expected to stay in contact with the embassies and inform them about their work.

It is important that a good flow of information is maintained between NORAD Oslo and the embassies. This is both to ensure an optimal level of interaction between the direct support and the support given through Norwegian organisations, and to avoid that the same organisations unknowingly receive support from more than one source.



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The administration of the direct support

Given that civil society support is to be an integrated part of the total portfolio of support to a given country, this should be reflected in the way the embassy administers the support. Rather than having specialised staff dealing with civil society only, the support should be integrated according to sectors in the portfolios of different members of staff. For instance, staff dealing with governance support or the education sector should be responsible both for support given to government as well as support given to civil organisations.

The embassy should on a continuous basis consider how many organisations it can and should fund direct. Alternative ways of supporting, through Norwegian organisations or institutions, through international organisations or the multilateral system, or through government sector programmes, trust funds or umbrella organisations, should always be considered.

The point of departure should be that the support given has an added value, first and foremost for development processes in the partner country, but also for the embassy itself. If the only role of an embassy is to be an administrator of direct support and few other gains can be found, the support should either be modified or phased out.

In NORAD, the direct support will be anchored in the regional departments. The Technical Department will play a crucial role in giving professional advice and The Department for Civil Society and Private Sector Development will act as a resource base and the main window for contact with the Norwegian organisations.

9 The scope of the support

Based on an analysis in the particular country, the relationship to civil society will be incorporated in strategic plans as well as the annual work plans of the embassies. No specific limits for how much support is to be channelled through civil society will be set, but it is important that there is a reasonable balance in the amount of funding, amount of work and attention given between the support given to government, the private sector and civil society. Each embassy will seek to find such a balance in cooperation with the partner countries and with NORAD headquarters.



The Liberal Party's election campaign with t-shirts, flags and posters in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. (November 2001)



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