

The Government's and Swedish  
civil society organisations'  
joint commitments to strengthen  
dialogue and collaboration in the area of  
development cooperation

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## **1. Preface**

The state and civil society have long been engaged in development cooperation, together as well as independently of one another. Through joint commitments, the Government and Swedish civil society organisations want to create a framework for their dialogue and highlight the value of Swedish civil society in development issues.

Swedish rights-based civil society organisations are very important for engagement in global development issues and for strengthening the results of Swedish development cooperation and its contribution to sustainable global development. Effective interaction between the Government and civil society is therefore important.

The joint commitments provide a basis for the MFA's relationship with Swedish civil society organisations. They were decided by the Government on 2 July 2015 and have broad political support. The Government and Swedish civil society organisations will implement the joint commitments and follow up that this has been done. The MFA has internal guidelines for their implementation.

## **2. Aim**

- To create a long-term approach based on joint principles and commitments.
- To create an inclusive dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations.
- To make use of the roles and added value of civil society organisations to achieve the overarching objectives of development cooperation.

## **3. Common starting points**

- The term 'civil society' refers to an arena – separate from the State, the market and private households – where people, groups and organisations act together in pursuit of common values and interests.
- The joint commitments serve as guidance and apply to civil society organisations as well as the Government.
- In this document, the civil society organisations referred to are Swedish, unless otherwise specified.
- The Government Offices and the relevant authorities have overarching responsibility for state-financed Swedish development cooperation. A significant proportion of this development cooperation includes support to the activities of Swedish civil society organisations.
- The joint commitments include the Government's activities at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and missions abroad as well as Swedish civil society organisations' development cooperation activities.
- Civil society organisations that choose not to subscribe to the joint commitments will be covered by the Government's commitments and their possibilities of receiving government financial assistance will not be affected.

#### **4. The roles, distinctive nature and added value of civil society organisations**

The Government and Swedish civil society organisations recognise important values among Swedish, international, regional, national and local civil society organisations' activities.

The democratic value of civil society organisations:

- A viable civil society in partner countries and Sweden is a prerequisite and an expression of free, sustainable and democratic societies. Civil society organisations serve as a collective voice and opinion-maker for the experiences of individuals and groups and are, in this sense, a part of society's vitality.

- Civil society organisations represent a variety of actors and target audiences with different and supplementary perspectives that contribute to a viable and pluralistic society and influence national and international policy to benefit people living in poverty and oppression.

- Civil society organisations contribute to mutual and constructive exchanges of experience and knowledge development. They promote sustainable development, gender equality, human rights and democracy, and they create commitment for global development issues.

The international work of civil society organisations:

- International processes and issues are influenced, enriched and challenged by globally organised civil society.

- Civil society organisations can act autonomously and in contexts where other actors have limited access.

- Civil society organisations can also act as protection and support for other civil society actors – groups and individual activists – subjected to violence and pressure.

The added value of Swedish civil society organisations:

- The Swedish tradition of an independent civil society based on popular movements contributes to the development of democratic civil society organisations in partner countries.

- Through their long-term engagement in countries and thematic issues, Swedish civil society organisations have created close, long-term and trusting relationships, based on national and local actors' objectives and opportunities to demand their rights.

- Swedish civil society organisations can convey their own knowledge, experience and perspectives, as well as that of their cooperation partners, to Swedish society and to Swedish decision-makers.

- Swedish civil society organisations make it possible for people in Sweden to get involved in international matters in a spirit of solidarity and influence Sweden's and the EU's policy of taking into account the perspectives of people living in poverty, human rights and sustainable global development.

- Civil society organisations work together based on a common set of values and without any interest in making a profit. Cooperation makes it possible to process difficult and complex issues and lasts beyond individual projects.

## **5. Joint undertaking to follow up the joint commitments**

The Government and civil society organisations undertake to:

- Spread knowledge about the joint commitments.

- Ensure compliance with the commitments.

- Meet at least once a year to follow up the joint commitments.

- Appoint a representative working group that continuously follows up and evaluates the joint commitments. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs' representative in the working group will be the same person as the Ministry's contact person for civil society organisations.

- Evaluate the joint commitments every three years and revise them if necessary.

## **6. Principles and commitments**

### **6.1 The principle of independence and autonomy**

- Because they act as a collective voice and opinion-makers, civil society organisations have a role to play in proposing ideas and exercising scrutiny.

- Civil society organisations are independent development actors that start and conduct activities according to their own objectives and guidelines.

- A favourable environment for civil society organisations' opportunity to act as independent and autonomous actors is key to democratic development.

#### **6.1.1 The Government's commitment**

The Government undertakes to:

- Safeguard civil society organisations' independence and autonomy to carry out their own activities.

- Work towards a favourable environment for civil society organisations to operate in Sweden and internationally.

- Promote the role of civil society organisations as collective voices and opinion-makers, in Sweden and internationally.

### **6.1.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

The civil society organisations undertake to:

- Work towards a favourable environment for civil society organisations to operate as autonomous actors in Sweden and internationally.
- Increase knowledge, shape opinion and increase engagement in global development issues in Sweden and internationally.

### **6.2 The dialogue principle**

The dialogue between the Government, missions abroad and civil society organisations is to:

- Help increase openness and participation in global development issues and strengthen the results and quality of Swedish development cooperation.
- Remain consistent, have a clear purpose and be imbued with an inclusive approach.
- Be characterised by reciprocity.
- Help enhance background material for decision-making in development policy.

#### **6.2.1 The Government's commitment**

The Government undertakes to:

- Create space for civil society organisations to hold a dialogue and develop information exchange with the Government on various policy issues.
- Inform relevant civil society organisations in good time about significant planned or ongoing processes within Swedish development cooperation.
- Consult relevant civil society organisations ahead of overarching and key decisions on Swedish aid policy.
- Consult relevant civil society organisations ahead of imminent changes in policy that directly affect the organisations' activities and conditions.
- Consult relevant civil society organisations at an early stage in relevant cases when strategies for development cooperation are being drawn up.
- Take responsibility for organising an annual forum to discuss development and aid issues.

#### **6.2.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

The civil society organisations undertake to:

- As far as possible, share knowledge, experience, perspectives and contacts with the Government and the missions abroad.
- Bring important development cooperation issues to the attention of the Government.
- Communicate partners' analyses, perspectives and priorities to the Government and the missions abroad.
- Present views and constructive proposals on Swedish development cooperation.

### **6.3 The quality principle**

- Cooperation and dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations promote quality in development cooperation.
- Learning should be in focus and should be shared to influence the future direction of development cooperation and to strengthen and improve its quality.

#### **6.3.1 The Government's commitments**

The Government undertakes to:

- Work to ensure that continual evaluations and research on development cooperation are conducted.
- Work to spread knowledge to civil society organisations on method development and review that is under way in development cooperation.
- Continue to work for increased aid and development effectiveness in accordance with the Paris, Accra and Busan declarations, by:
  - o Working for an inclusive partnership with civil society and other actors based on openness, trust, joint learning and mutual respect for one another's complementary roles.
  - o Promote national and local ownership of development strategies and programmes.
  - o Seek a focus on results adapted to partners' priorities and policies.
  - o Work to increase donor coordination and alignment to partners' priorities and working methods to reduce transaction costs.
  - o Seek mutual openness and opportunities to demand accountability among all actors in development cooperation.

#### **6.3.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

Based on the Istanbul principles, civil society organisations undertake to:

- Work in partnership with cooperation organisations, or directly with rights holders, based on mutual respect and confidence.
- Work to coordinate with other civil society organisations.
- Strengthen the capacity of cooperation partners to achieve their own objectives.
- Continuously develop partnerships, approaches and methods with cooperation organisations so as to maximise learning and results for rights holders.
- Respect cooperation partners' and rights holders' ownership of their own development programmes and projects in terms of design, implementation and follow-up.
- Integrate principles of gender equality, sustainability and rights perspectives in their own development cooperation and in dialogues with the Government and missions abroad.

#### **6.4 The principle of a long-term approach**

- A favourable environment for civil society organisations to operate in Sweden and partner countries promotes a long-term approach and sustainability in development cooperation.
- Broad political support for the joint commitments promotes their long-term validity and significance.

##### **6.4.1 The Government's commitments**

The Government undertakes to:

- Work to ensure clear and long-term conditions for civil society organisations to pursue their activities.

##### **6.4.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

The civil society organisations undertake to:

- As far as possible, work in long-term relationships with cooperation partners, or directly with rights holders, with the aim of achieving sustainable and long-term development results and policy changes.

#### **6.5 The principle of openness and transparency**

Openness and transparency in the Government's and civil society organisations' development cooperation is a prerequisite for:

- Combating corruption.
- Creating engagement and influencing development cooperation.
- Demanding accountability and achieving results.

When requirements for openness are associated with major risks, the safety of people and cooperation organisations must come first.

##### **6.5.1 The Government's commitments**

The Government undertakes to:

- Work for open bilateral, EU and multilateral development cooperation.
- Where relevant, give civil society organisations access to contacts, information and knowledge in the area of development cooperation.
- Combat corruption within the framework of managing Swedish aid funds and making demands on and supporting cooperation partners' efforts to combat corruption.
- Strengthen a free and open exchange of views on development cooperation.
- Promote openness in relationships and the dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations.



- Include perspectives and views from civil society organisations' cooperation partners, including target audiences for development cooperation.
- Be open with regard to selection processes for invitations to civil society organisations to participate in meetings and/or accompany delegations in international negotiations concerning development cooperation.

#### **6.5.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

The civil society organisations undertake to:

- Seek openness and accountability in Swedish development cooperation.
- Seek openness and accountability in their own development cooperation by publishing relevant documentation.
- Share information that facilitates cooperation partners' and rights holders' participation and opportunities to demand accountability.
- Promote open dialogue and debate among civil society organisations in development cooperation.
- Be prepared to manage complaints from Swedish stakeholders, cooperation partners and rights holders.
- Combat corruption in the management of Swedish aid funds.

#### **6.6 The diversity principle**

A range of civil society organisations in Swedish development cooperation with regard to identity, number and type of organisations and area of activity strengthens the possibilities to achieve the objective of development cooperation.

##### **6.6.1 The Government's commitments**

The Government undertakes to:

- Promote a variety of civil society organisations with democratic values in Swedish development cooperation as part of the efforts to strengthen development cooperation results.
- Be open towards new civil society actors and development cooperation methods.

##### **6.6.2 Civil society organisations' commitments**

The civil society organisations undertake to:

- Strengthen diversity of perspectives, skills and experience in Swedish civil society organisations.
- Safeguard a viable, rights-based and pluralistic civil society in countries where Swedish civil society organisations operate.