

Strategy for development cooperation with Myanmar, 2018–2022

1. Direction

The objective of Sweden’s international development cooperation is to create opportunities for people living in poverty and oppression to improve their living conditions. Development cooperation will be based on the principles of aid and development effectiveness, and the new international agreements the international community agreed on in 2015.¹

Within the framework of this strategy, Sweden’s development cooperation with Myanmar will contribute to a democratic, gender-equal, peaceful and inclusive society where equitable health, human rights and the rule of law are respected and people’s vulnerability to crises and disasters is reduced. The strategy’s contribution to tackling the multidimensional crisis of the Rohingya people is part of all objectives and implementation. The strategy will apply for the period 2018–2022 and comprise of SEK 1 250 million for activities implemented by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and SEK 30 million for activities implemented by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) for the same period. The aims of these activities are interlinked and an integrated approach should be applied.

Sida’s activities are expected to contribute to the following objectives:

Human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality

- Strengthened respect for human rights, gender equality, human security and improved protection for vulnerable people
- Improved democratic governance, reduced corruption and improved opportunities for responsibility and accountability in public institutions
- Greater freedom of expression and increased capacity of civil society and independent media to perform their democratic and scrutiny functions

Peaceful inclusive societies

- Strengthened capacity to prevent violent conflict and ensure inclusive peacebuilding
- Improved participation and influence of women and young people in conflict management and peacebuilding
- Improved conditions for civil society to contribute to peacebuilding

Equitable health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights

- Improved access to good health and medical services, especially in those parts of the country with least access
- Increased knowledge about and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights

The FBA’s activities will contribute to the following objectives:

¹ The development agenda includes the 2030 Agenda with its 17 Global Goals and 169 targets for sustainable development, the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) and the Paris Agreement.

- Strengthened capacity for inclusive peacebuilding and dialogue
- Improved respect for and application of the rule of law

2. Country context

Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in Asia. One third of the population are thought to be living in absolute poverty, and an additional third are very close to the poverty line. There is therefore a high level of vulnerability among the population. The majority of the population living in poverty are in rural areas. In areas where ethnic minorities live and where there are ongoing active armed conflicts, over half of the population live in poverty. Many of the country's internally displaced persons live in these areas and are dependent on humanitarian support.

Since 2015, Myanmar has been led by a democratically elected government. However, the political landscape is marked by a critical democratic deficit. Under Myanmar's constitution, the military appoints 25 per cent of the seats in the union, state and regional parliaments, which gives the military a right of veto on constitutional amendments. The military also has political influence that curtails the people's opportunity to fully elect their representatives. The military controls the interior, border and defence ministries, and is not subordinate to the civilian part of the government. Through the interior ministry, the military controls public administration at state and local level. The state apparatus has been designed and managed by military governments for decades. Experience of delivering public services is low, as is capacity to do this. The judicial system and state institutions are generally weak and corruption is widespread. The citizens' confidence in state institutions is low.

The ongoing armed conflicts in several states are among the world's longest-lasting civil wars. The parties in the national peace process have widely differing views in terms of both interpretation of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) entered into and the wider peace process. One key issue is the forms of a federal solution for separation of powers between central and local level. Several of the largest armed groups from the northern parts of the country have so far chosen to remain outside of the process. The process is being run top-down and broader groups and interests in society lack proper influence and representation in the peace process. This also applies to women and young people. The space available to civil society organisations is limited. Continued attacks by the military and armed confrontations, primarily in Kachin State and Northern Shan State, have caused immense suffering and humanitarian needs, and have further complicated the peace process.

The situation in Rakhine State is serious. Excessive violence by the military against the Rohingya people has caused enormous suffering, destruction and increased tensions. The systematic and planned nature of the atrocities indicates that crimes against humanity have been committed. In the northern parts of Rakhine 90 per cent of the Rohingya population, approximately 700 000 people, are believed to have fled in 2017, mainly to Bangladesh. At the time of adopting this strategy, the context on the ground is not conducive to a large-scale return to Rakhine State. In central Rakhine, some 120 000 Rohingya people are living in camps for internally displaced people following violent clashes in 2012. Reconciliation and development in Rakhine, the second poorest state in

Myanmar, are aggravated by tensions, distrust and hate propaganda, and the points of contact between different groups in Rakhine State are few.

Throughout the country there are challenges concerning respect for and protection of human rights. Discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, religion and gender is a common occurrence. The military as well as ethnic armed groups commit human rights violations in conflict areas with impunity. Freedom of expression and freedom of opinion, including freedom of the press and freedom of information, have gradually been strengthened. Serious challenges remain and the trend is once again negative. Repressive legislation is used against dissidents. Human rights defenders are at risk.

Women and girls are subjected to discrimination, partly as a result of conservative and religious norms. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are a neglected area. Women and girls from the ethnic minorities are more vulnerable when it comes to access to health and education. Women, young people and children often lack the power to make decisions about their own bodies, health and sexuality. Sexual and gender-based violence are very common.

Smartphones and social media have created new and important platforms, although there are major differences in access to information via the internet between urban and rural areas. A free internet helps to empower discriminated and vulnerable groups, but it is still associated with major risks, including hate propaganda that can quickly spread.

Myanmar is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of natural disasters. Environmental damage following large-scale infrastructure projects and exploitation of natural resources is common. The vulnerability and the resilience of poor households is aggravated by their vulnerability to conflict-related crises, natural disasters, environmental damage and climate change.

Myanmar has low values on most health indicators. The national health system is lacking both staff and medicine. Necessary capacity and infrastructure are lacking in many places. Maternal mortality has dropped but remains at a high level compared with other countries in the region. Unsafe abortions are the cause of 10 per cent of maternal mortality. In the poorest groups, one in ten children die before the age of five. A serious health problem for children in Myanmar is undernourishment as a result of inadequate access to a nutritious and varied diet. The poorest people, the most vulnerable women and the ethnic populations are often facing poor lower quality care and some have no access whatsoever to medical care.

3. Activities

Sweden's development cooperation with Myanmar should be based on and characterised by a rights perspective and the perspective of poor people on development. The rights perspective means that human rights and democracy are to be seen as fundamental to development. This approach involves giving visibility, prior to each contribution, to individuals and groups who are discriminated against, excluded or marginalised, so that all people can enjoy their rights, regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual orientation, or transgender identity or expression. The perspective of

poor people on development means that the situation, needs, circumstances and priorities of poor women, men and children should be used as the basis for poverty reduction and the promotion of equitable and sustainable development.

Sweden's development cooperation should be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, as well as gender-equal. Sweden's development cooperation is based on a comprehensive approach to the challenges, needs and circumstances of people and societies. The guiding principle is that economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are to be understood and managed in an integrated context. Gender equality and the empowerment and rights of women and girls are both goals in themselves and a prerequisite and a means for achieving sustainable global development. Violence and armed conflict are among the greatest obstacles to economic and social development, and development cooperation is an important part of conflict prevention. For this reason, an environmental and climate perspective, a gender perspective and a conflict perspective are to be systematically integrated into Sweden's development cooperation with Myanmar.

Internationally agreed principles on development effectiveness will be applied to Sweden's development cooperation and adapted to the specific context. The main responsibility for a country's development lies with the partner countries' governments and other national actors. Ownership is seen in a broad, inclusive perspective and, in addition to state actors, includes relevant parts of civil society. Country ownership of the development process must be at the core of development cooperation. The forthcoming Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan and other national steering documents are of relevance in this regard.

The current context in Myanmar particularly requires flexibility and accuracy in the implementation of the strategy. At the time of the strategy's entry into force, developments in several areas in which activities are expected to create sustainable results are heading in the wrong direction. There needs to be preparedness to adapt the strategy's implementation to changing conditions and identify possible ways to combat a negative trend.

The overall support for the most vulnerable people should promote resilience. One important component in achieving this is greater collaboration between humanitarian and development initiatives through shared analyses, planning and formulation of goals. Development cooperation plays an important role in dealing with the underlying causes of crises and strengthening poor and vulnerable people's resilience and possibilities to recover from crises. Activities should make use of opportunities to contribute to preventing crises, violent conflicts and disasters, strengthening societies' resilience and reducing humanitarian dependence in particularly vulnerable areas, including Rakhine. This includes climate change adaptation.

A consistent focus on gender equality should be integrated in all areas of work. This can be combined with targeted support to organisations and networks that have women's rights and gender equality as their main objective.

The Rohingya population is particularly vulnerable and should be given priority in implementation. Sida should ensure a holistic approach in Sweden's development

cooperation relating to the situation of the Rohingya, in collaboration with Sweden's humanitarian support. Coordination should be sought between strategies that include activities focusing on the Rohingya. Within the framework of this strategy's objectives, activities should contribute to poverty reduction, peace and reconciliation in Rakhine State, and strengthening the conditions for the voluntary return of refugees from Bangladesh. At the time the strategy is adopted, the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (the Annan report) are the established and internationally accepted roadmap. An active dialogue with the Government of Myanmar and other donors is necessary for coordinated and non-discriminatory support to Rakhine State. Sida should also seek a holistic approach to other refugee situations in the region that are a result of armed conflict in Myanmar.

Activities in support of **human rights, democracy and the rule of law** will help to strengthen the most vulnerable people and support them in enjoying their human rights. This may include strengthening the state's possibility to fulfil its obligations by promoting more democratic, efficient and effective institutions. Support that strengthens state and non-state actors' anti-corruption work should be considered. Preventing impunity is crucial if reconciliation is to be achieved. Development cooperation should help to increase human security and improve protection and freedom from violence for vulnerable people, not least children and young people. Conditions for accountability should be strengthened, including measures for freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and the right to information. Labour rights, such as freedom of association and social dialogue, are also important and can be supported. Activities will target key agents of change. Independent professional media and a free, open and secure internet have an important role to play, both as goals in themselves and as platforms for asserting other rights. Rights concerning ownership and use of land and natural resources are key to several areas within the strategy's objectives and can be supported.

Activities in support of **peaceful, inclusive societies** should contribute to peacebuilding and prevention of violence, based on broad public participation. Priority should be given to confidence-building measures and reconciliation for peaceful coexistence, also related to ethnic and religious tensions. Activities should contribute to a better reflection of the needs of rights holders as a way to support the wider peace process. Support that contributes to women's and young people's meaningful participation in decision-making at different levels concerning peace and armed conflict is of great importance. This includes women's empowerment and financial autonomy. Children's perspectives and voices will be taken into account. Civil society actors have a key role in efforts for peaceful and inclusive societies and will be supported.

Activities in support of **equitable health** will support and complement the country's national health plan. This includes support to health systems. Priority will be given to access to health care in areas where the state does not have capacity or the access to implement health care, such as areas affected by conflict and areas that are fully or partially controlled by ethnic groups. This includes maternal and child health. Activities that increase information and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights will be implemented. This work includes the abortion issue. Young people are an important target group.

Activities should as far as possible be integrated and can contribute to several goals simultaneously.

The main **channels** for the implementation of development cooperation with Myanmar should be civil society organisations, local, multilateral and international organisations, and joint donor funds. Collaboration with the business sector may be considered. Target groups are mainly made up of ethnic minorities, women and young people. A broader target group may be justified for some activities. A strong conflict sensitivity perspective is key to implementation.

The FBA's activities should contribute to strengthened capacity for inclusive peacebuilding and dialogue, and greater respect for and application of the rule of law. The FBA should design and develop activities that contribute to the goals. For example, the FBA's activities may include training, advice, secondments, methods development and policy support.

The Government's view is that budget support or direct support to state institutions should not be initiated in the current circumstances. At the same time, strengthened institutions are important in a long-term perspective. Sida can contribute to capacity-enhancing support through joint donor funds or multilateral organisations that have state institutions as cooperation partners, if this is considered a strategic way to contribute to the strategy's goals and if the conditions are in place for the necessary follow-up and controls. If the circumstances change, Sida may – following consultation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – consider gradually increasing its direct cooperation with the state.

The FBA may include state actors in dialogue and capacity-enhancing activities, but not state military institutions or functions in Myanmar. If the circumstances clearly change, the FBA may – following consultation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – consider small-scale cooperation (with possibility to scale up) with state military institutions and functions if this is considered to be a strategic way to contribute to the FBA's goals for the strategy.

Sida's and the FBA's activities will be followed up in line with the principles and processes stated in the Government's guidelines for strategies in Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

Sweden will act to promote coherent and effective development cooperation coordination in the country primarily by means of active participation in EU coordination and joint programming.

Synergies between the different areas of the strategy will be sought. Synergies will also be sought with activities within the framework of other regional, bilateral and thematically oriented strategies. Support via multilateral organisations should be compatible with Swedish priorities and approaches in partnership with multilateral organisations.

The strategy's implementation must be characterised by a tailored and exploratory working method. Sida will ensure a holistic perspective in all Swedish support to Myanmar in the implementation of the strategy. Sweden's considerable development cooperation commitments, including via multilateral organisations, will form the basis of dialogue and influence in the country and the region.