

# **EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS**



A study on development effectiveness and  
Swedish civil society organisations

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# Executive summary

This report was commissioned by ForumCiv to investigate how Swedish civil society organisations work with development effectiveness. At the same time, an effort should be made to identify obstacles and opportunities in the implementation of development effectiveness principles to find potential for improvements. The study was conducted through telephone interviews with 11 major Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). As this report is qualitative in nature, it does not go in-depth into whether each and every indicator has been fulfilled or not. Rather, it uses a more analytical approach to try to understand how each CSO deals with the overall principles and how CSOs relate to their partners in recipient countries. The interview questions therefore mainly deal with general principles of ownership, results, inclusive partnerships, transparency and accountability.

The discourse on development effectiveness stems from late 1960s and the introduction of country planning which was based on the concept of ownership. During the crisis years of the 1980s, a period of donorship prevailed but ownership was revived in the name of aid effectiveness in the early 2000s by a serious discussion in the OECD/DAC leading to the Paris Agenda in 2005. From that date, ownership has been back on the agenda for most of the time and is an important part of the international community's and Sweden's strategy of how to implement development cooperation efficiently.

The Declaration from Paris in 2005, and later the one from Busan in 2011, defined aid effectiveness in five and four points, respectively. With the increased engagement of the CSO community after Busan 2011, the concept of aid effectiveness was found to be too narrow and therefore changed towards a wider concept of development effectiveness. The eight Istanbul Principles agreed by the CSO community in 2010 list the original concepts of

methodology and add a number of points more related to the content of aid such as equality, climate, and human rights. Development effectiveness is thus defined by a large number of principles.

CSOs all take the concept of development effectiveness seriously and have introduced most of the principles into their strategies and working methodology. Developing good partnerships with their counterpart organisations in recipient countries is the basis of their theory of change, making ownership possible and allowing for an entry point to beneficiaries and ultimate target groups for their work. Transparency and accountability are other important principles that are given high priority by all the CSOs surveyed and are under constant scrutiny. Harmonisation and alignment were less prioritised by most of the CSOs and would do well from increased attention.

Two areas are more problematic and would benefit from more attention and work. The first relates to the question of reporting results and the relationship with Sida, where CSOs express the view that some issues require further discussion and clarification. The second regards the room for flexibility and innovation in a world full of problems and contradiction, such as shrinking space for civil society, nationalism, and global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, economic recession, and climate change. If Sida or the Swedish government are not prepared to take any financial risk, CSOs, despite their best efforts, could face insurmountable challenges.

In a complicated world with many global challenges, development effectiveness is more important than ever. To enable the honourable principles to be implemented, all actors have to cooperate and work for its proper implementation, and this requires dialogue, compromise, and flexibility.

# Rapid changes in the global landscape

Both the world order and the global development cooperation system are rapidly changing, with a number of new actors on the scene. The power balance is gradually shifting from West to East and South, where demographic as well as economic growth has been much higher since the beginning of the century. Climate and environment changes, new communication technologies, and international production value chains contribute to globalisation, increased mutual dependencies, migrant flows, and local conflicts. Competition for natural resources and economic and political influence between traditional and emerging powers provide a new aid landscape, with new actors, new international alliances, and new channels. Corruption is widespread locally as well as internationally. It is deepening and reflects inequalities. Threats from terrorism and threats from some of the protective measures to meet those threats reduce openness and freedom in many countries. The rapid development of communication networks, typified by the IT revolution makes information flows to all parts of the globe possible in no time (Wohlgemuth and Oden, 2019).

The world is integrating rapidly at the same time as a new wave of fragmentation is developing, based on nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Authoritarianism and populism are gradually spreading, following the democratisation wave of the 1990s, with shrinking space for civil society, political opposition, and changes in constitutions as a consequence (VDEM 2020).

Global challenges such as climate change, environmental disasters, food and water security, social and economic inequality, and threats to health such as pandemics and antibiotic resistance, can only be handled by global governance and international cooperation (UNDP 2019). Efforts to create international in-

stitutions and regulations for such purposes are often hampered by perceived and often short-sighted national self-interest. Enlightened global leadership is a necessity which, to a large extent, is lacking (WEF 2019).

This complex context has made it more challenging for CSO and aid organisations to operate and address developmental challenges. To this should be added the effects and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The emergency measures taken to combat the spread of the virus has given new instruments to authoritarian regimes and strengthened nationalistic developments. This has also affected international cooperation within the EU, the UN, and development banks. The pandemic may also lead to decreasing support for poorer countries. At the same time, already vulnerable populations in poor countries are more likely to suffer from economic recession, economic nationalism, and ill-health (UN/DESA, 2020). The development effectiveness agenda is more relevant today than ever before and more difficult to implement.

# New frameworks changing the development cooperation landscape

In 2015, the UN General Assembly agreed on the 2030 Agenda – a survival strategy for humanity that seeks to tackle environmental, economic, and social challenges with equal urgency – and requiring every nation to take action in accordance with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its 169 targets. In contrast to their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000, the SDGs include all countries of the world requesting them to fulfil the goals nationally and contributing to achieving them through international cooperation. Everybody should be responsible, and everybody has to act.

This implies that development cooperation takes on a new dimension and new approaches. It also needs new sources of financial support. The idea – already presented in the Swedish Policy for Global Development (PGD) – to urge coherence between all policy areas to make global development an integral part of Swedish policy in general, is taken a step further. The SDGs have thereby contributed to some of the recent changes in the global development arena and affected policy frameworks of several donor countries.



**LEAVE NO ONE  
BEHIND**

# Development effectiveness in focus

For many decades, CSOs all over the world have engaged in policy dialogue with bilateral and multilateral donors on key process dimensions of development cooperation. In the 1960s and 1970s, this included a focus on promoting popular participation in development cooperation. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was strong focus on limiting the use of conditionality and untying aid. After the turn of the century and following initial discussions for reform in notably aid-dependent states such as Tanzania and Mozambique, CSOs began to further engage in the overall governance of development cooperation.

In their engagement in the governance of development cooperation, CSOs placed considerable emphasis on the importance of ownership by developing country actors and citizens, not only governments, i.e. democratic ownership. CSOs also encouraged further coordination and division of labour among donors and the promotion of innovative modalities that were more conducive to developing country leadership. CSOs were thus a strong driver behind the international agenda for aid effectiveness that emerged after the 2002 UN Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development.

Although CSOs, in their strong diversity, showed concerted action in promoting the adoption and use of aid effectiveness objectives by multilateral and bilateral donors, they were more divided on the extent to which they should adhere to such principles themselves. Some CSOs further explored joined-up action with other actors, others decentralised their operations in developing countries to further enable ownership and partnership with local organisations, while others were more path-dependent and remained limited to a watchdog role in their engagement on aid effectiveness. In more recent years, the new emphasis on multi-stakeholder approaches and the involvement of the private sector offer opportunities as well as pose risks for civil society's involvement in development effectiveness.

This chapter will further analyse the international aid effectiveness agenda and discuss the engagement of CSOs in this context.

## **The Paris Declaration - from Paris to Busan**

Within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, donors have tried to operationalise their experiences and agree on common views on what is meant by effective assistance. In the early 1990s, an agenda of best practices was developed which was based on what was required for development to take off (DAC, 1992). A document published in 1996, titled "Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-Operation" proved particularly influential on the MDGs and subsequent aid effectiveness agenda (DAC, 1996).

At the end of the 1990s, the issue of more effective development cooperation was accelerated within DAC. This first led to the Rome Declaration in 2003 on Harmonisation and Alignment and culminated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005. While the Millennium Declaration has had great impact on the content of development cooperation and the operationalisation of the goal to alleviate poverty, the Paris Declaration and the agenda for effective development cooperation which it encompasses, has been significant for the methodology of development assistance.

A key element of the Paris Declaration was the decision to associate indicators to each of the principles to allow for measuring progress over time. This was done by means of a detailed survey conducted every two years, and independent evaluations published in 2008 and 2011.

A third high-level meeting to follow up the implementation of the Paris Declaration was held in Accra, Ghana, 2008. The commitments of the declaration were confirmed and further elaborated on some points, regarding among other issues alignment, increased transparency in

# The Paris Declaration's five key principles

## **OWNERSHIP**

This reflects the efforts made by partner countries to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and to coordinate development activities. The Declaration commits partner countries to develop and implement their strategies through broad consultative processes and to take the lead in coordinating development aid in dialogue with donors, while at the same time encouraging the participation of non-state actors. The Declaration calls upon donors to respect this leadership and strengthen partner countries' capacity to exercise it.

## **HARMONISATION**

Efforts to be made by donors to align policies and procedures that govern their support so as to avoid imposing varying and conflicting requirements on partner countries which reduce the effectiveness of development cooperation efforts. The Declaration emphasises the need for harmonisation, increasing transparency, and improving collective effectiveness (through division of labour) of donors' actions.

## **ALIGNMENT**

Donors seek to align their support with priorities and strategies set by partner countries, rather than imposing their own priorities. This also means building up and relying on partner countries' own mechanisms for implementing projects, rather than putting parallel systems in place. For their part, partner countries undertake to make a greater effort to adopt sound strategies and set appropriate priorities, and to strengthen and improve their institutions.

## **MANAGING FOR RESULTS**

Donors and partner countries jointly undertake to try to manage and implement aid in ways that focus on desired results, and to improve evidence-based decision-making. Parties undertake to work together on a participatory basis to strengthen the capacity of developing countries and to sharpen their focus on results-based management.

## **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Donors and partner countries agree to prioritise mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources. Mutual progress towards meeting the commitments on aid effectiveness made in the Declaration will be jointly assessed with the aid of country-level mechanisms (DAC, 2005a).

the work of donors, and the predictability of aid flows. The participation of civil society organisations in their own right was also acknowledged, and additional emphasis was put on the need for broad-based and democratic ownership of development – beyond central government. Additional, ambitious, and time-bound commitments were made, but in many cases not adhered to due to the start of the global financial and economic crisis shortly after the conclusion of the meeting in Accra.

A fourth high-level meeting in Busan, South Korea, took place in late 2011. As part of the preparations for this meeting, an international evaluation of achievements was published. It concluded that some progress had been made but that they were far from achieving the commitments made in 2005. In general, recipient countries' progress was more significant than that of donors. The recommendations of the evaluation suggested continued high-level political commitment, improvement in mutual accountability, and that recipients had to take full responsibility for their own development, and donors take full responsibility for their commitments.

At the Busan meeting, traditional and new development stakeholders, including China, agreed to restructure development cooperation around four basic principles: 1) Ownership of development priorities by aid-receiving countries. 2) Focus on results. 3) Inclusive partnerships, which promotes mutual learning and trust. 4) Transparency and accountability to each other. Ownership, results, and accountability are directly derived from the Paris principles, while inclusive partnerships and transparency were added to the development cooperation debate.

Busan further allowed for a broadening of the number of stakeholders included in the process, most importantly the emerging, large middle income countries, new international foundations, and a number of private sector actors. Acknowledgement was also made of the private sector's important role in the development process.

The “new” emerging actors were only willing to adhere to commitments on an explicitly voluntary basis, and it was clear that not all Southern actors would move at

the same speed. The Busan forum also created a new venue to carry the aid effectiveness discussion forward, called the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. The governance of the partnership was to be the responsibility of a steering committee. The implementation and monitoring processes were thereby moved from the DAC secretariat to the new steering committee (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011).

Another new feature launched during the Busan meeting was that “alliances of willing stakeholders” among governments, international organisations, parliamentarians, CSOs and private sector interests could form smaller groups in order to push specific issues further than if unanimity had been needed. Eight voluntary building blocks were formed by willing partners with the aim of sharing best practice and successful examples in areas of common interest. The list of building blocks includes: conflict and fragility, South-South cooperation, the private sector, climate finance, transparency, effective institutions, results and mutual accountability, managing diversity and reducing fragmentation.

### **The Paris Agenda post-Busan**

Following six months of discussions in the Post-Busan Interim Group, the DAC's Working Party on Aid Effectiveness was phased out and replaced by the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation with divided responsibility between UNDP and DAC in June 2012. The international focus has since then moved from the Busan issues into the various international initiatives aimed at what should replace the MDGs after 2015 and subsequently the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Already in the run-up to Busan, the energy in the OECD for international discussions on aid effectiveness was waning, which could be seen in the long time it took for the EU to adopt its joint negotiation position and the limited influence this had.

The Global Partnership is a multi-stakeholder platform to advance the effectiveness of development efforts by all actors in delivering results that are long-lasting and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, including



# 부산세계개발원조총회 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness

Building a New Global Partnership  
for Effective Development Cooperation



Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Republic of Korea. Credit: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

the commitment to leave no one behind. Its major instrument is its biennial monitoring exercise, which since 2013 has tracked progress towards the effectiveness principles and is the recognised source of data and evidence on upholding effectiveness commitments.

The Global Partnership monitoring exercise has two fundamental objectives. The first is to assess how effectively governments have established a conducive environment to lead national development efforts, enable the full participation of the whole of society and maximise the impact of joint efforts. The second is to assess how development partners deliver their support in a way that focuses on country-owned development priorities and that draws on existing country systems and capacities to reduce burden and ensure sustainability of results. The 2019 Progress Report addresses these two objectives in turn (OECD/UNDP, 2019).

Despite its lofty ambitions, the Global Partnership has a lighter structure and a smaller secretariat than its predecessor while having fewer meetings which the work

of the aforementioned ‘building blocks’ feeds into. As a result, in many OECD countries the process has significantly lost prominence (Oden and Wohlgemuth, 2013).

A basic problem that has been discussed extensively is that the principles of the Paris Agenda and Busan document soon became synonymous with effective development, the assumption being that applying them would undoubtedly lead to better results. Subsequent work has therefore tended to focus on if they had been applied or not rather than whether that application led to the predicted benefits. Another major question has been how to deal with development cooperation not directly channelled country to country but through a chain of intermediary actors and how to assess the principles if this is the case. However, these assumptions have been increasingly challenged in recent years. While everyone still wants development cooperation that delivers, the question is whether the principles are fit for that purpose. Some work has been done to discuss these issues. Among others the EU commissioned a study in the first half of 2019, looking at whether applying the principles on the

ground has really led to better results (EU, 2018). The results of that study are still pending.

During much of the 2010s, there were changes in the principles of many donor countries from ownership to “donorship” as the view was that development cooperation should mainly be an instrument for the donor – politically, commercially, and in terms of, for example, migration and security. There is an increasing trend in OECD states to make such ‘mutual benefit’ orientations explicit in development policies. This trend threatens the sustainability of development interventions (Keijzer & Lundsgaarde 2017).

When it comes to monitoring and evaluation, the new public management model results-based management (RBM) was introduced in 2006. Sweden was at the time one of the most enthusiastic followers of this trend. As the negative side effects of this model became more and more evident – short-sightedness, accountability, and control instead of learning, the use of prefabricated blueprints, etc. – it became less popular (Eyben, 2015; Shutt, 2016; Vähämäki, 2017). It seems that the new trend in this field will be based on what is called Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation or Doing Development Differently (DDD) starting with the DDD Manifesto 2014 (DDD, 2014, Horst et al, 2020). This trend, which has so far only been seriously accepted by very few actors in the field, should imply among other things a return of trust, local ownership, improved risk handling, stepwise monitoring and adaptation to local contextual realities and greater flexibility to respond to changing circumstances (Wohlgemuth and Oden 2019).

The different kinds of adaptive management are based on an approach rather than a specific method. This approach can be applied to a varying degree. Central to this approach is to treat plans as hypotheses which regularly need to be questioned and revised the more you learn about the problem that is being addressed and about the context. Thus, the approach recognises the uncertainty about what is likely to work. Learning is crucial in adaptive management: flexible plans are tested, monitored, analysed, and adapted regularly until objectives are achieved.

Adaptive management implies more than a general commitment to working flexibly and learning from experience. It requires methods, tools, routines, and the mindset to regularly question whether current ways of working are making progress towards the desired change or not and, if not, have the freedom and courage to change them accordingly (Sida, 2018).

The latest high-level meeting of the Global Partnership reviewed the international efforts for development effectiveness and drew some sobering conclusions. The Co-Chairs proposal to the meeting held in New York in 2019 states:

*“With the SDGs locked in, and the resources continuously constrained, the quality and impact of our partnerships is the element that can make the difference. We have roughly two years to make this case in a way that reinforces political commitment. Success will require building on our wins so far and turning challenges into opportunities. It will require a serious look at the impact of effectiveness and of our effort to leave no one behind. It will also require showing that we are open to and capable of change - in what we do, in how we work and, importantly, in the language we use to communicate about effectiveness.”*  
(GPEDC, 2019.1)

The focus in that work will firstly be to better demonstrate the impact of the partnerships on effectiveness, secondly allow for increased inclusiveness in the partnerships including civil society and the private sector actors and thirdly improving the monitoring process allowing for new kinds of cooperation including adaptive management methods.



# Civil society organisations and development effectiveness

CSOs did participate in the work leading up to the Paris Agenda and did also sign the declaration in 2005. They did however feel that the declaration did not take the CSOs interests sufficiently into account, while they also did not consider all five principles to be directly applicable to themselves. Therefore an Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness was set up by and for CSOs worldwide, to create a shared framework of principles that defined effective CSO development practice and elaborated the minimum standards for an enabling environment for CSOs, while at the same time promoting civil society's essential role in the international development cooperation system. The Open Forum process was set up in 2008 following the Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, in response to the call to CSOs to articulate their own statement on development effectiveness. The mandate of the Open Forum run until the Fourth High-Level Forum at the end of 2011 in Busan, South Korea, where its conclusions were presented.

At the same time, the outcomes of the process became a reference point for CSOs on their own effectiveness as independent development actors.

## **The objectives of the Open Forum form three key pillars:**

- Achieving a consensus on a set of global Principles for Development Effectiveness
- Developing guidelines for CSOs to implement the Principles
- Advocating to governments for a more enabling environment for CSOs to operate (Bermann, 2011).

These three components form the Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness. In the three years of its mandate, (2009 to 2011), the Open Forum reached out to thousands of CSOs across the globe through national, regional, and thematic consultations with the aim of identifying the



common principles that guide their work as civil society and the standards for an environment in which they can operate most effectively. The worldwide consultation process was designed to enable the greatest possible number of CSOs to contribute, ensuring that the Open Forum process was legitimate and inclusive of civil society globally. In conjunction with the civil society consultations, the Open Forum also held multi-stakeholder meetings at regional, national, and international levels to facilitate dialogue and discussion between CSOs, donors and governments on the enabling conditions for a vibrant civil society. Based on the inputs generated from the thousands of stakeholders who participated in the Open Forum consultation process, the first Global Assembly of the Open Forum in Istanbul, Turkey (September 2010) endorsed the eight “Istanbul Principles” of CSO Development Effectiveness, which form the basis for effective development work by CSOs around the globe. At the second and concluding Global Assembly of the Open Forum in Siem Reap, Cambodia (June 2011), the final version of the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness, including the eight Istanbul Principles, was endorsed (Bermann, 2011).

The International Framework was accompanied by a Companion Toolkit which provided guidance on how to put the Principles into practice, and an Advocacy Toolkit with guidance on how CSOs can use the messages in the International Framework to advocate for a more enabling environment in their national and regional contexts. With the agreement on the final version of the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness, and through the Open Forum process, CSOs fulfilled its ambitious vision to develop a collective and consolidated statement of global civil society on CSO development effectiveness principles and practices (Bermann, 2011).

After Busan, Open Forum and the CSO partnership for development effectiveness, established in 2011, joined forces to create a Multi-stakeholder coalition called the Task Team on CSO development effectiveness and enabling environment. The purpose was to work together to advance effective CSO participation in development processes, to support CSOs worldwide, to fully play their role as key actors in development. The Task Team operates

on the assumption that CSOs are key actors in development. It is therefore working on furthering effective CSO participation in development processes. The Task Team promotes and advances international commitments in this area. Its focus is on the commitment to create a conducive environment for CSOs and the commitment on the effectiveness and accountability of CSOs themselves. Both need to be met for CSOs to maximise their contribution to the SDGs.

As a convener, the Task Team brings together donors, partner country governments, and CSOs to engage in open and inclusive dialogue to find common ground. As a knowledge broker, it raises awareness on international commitments on CSOs in development and offers guidance, data, and practical tools to further their implementation. The Task Team is a multi-stakeholder coalition. Its participants are drawn from three stakeholder groups: donors, partner country governments, and CSOs (affiliated with the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness). The Task Team has around 30 active participants and strives for equal participation from its three stakeholder groups. It has three co-chairs, one from each constituency (Task Team 2019).

The Task Team concentrates its engagement with the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) as well as the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Since Busan, the Task Team has worked as a voluntary initiative affiliated with the GPEDC and continued its work in promoting and advancing the CSO-related commitments. These were reaffirmed at the 2014 High-Level Meeting of the GPEDC in Mexico as well as the 2016 High-Level Meeting in Nairobi and in New York in 2019.

With regard to bilateral and multilateral donors, these high-level meetings have been of less and less importance over the years, for the CSOs they have been more and more important. To a degree that for some donor organisations it has been seen as taken over by the CSO community. In summary it seems that while Busan became an end station for bilateral and multilateral donors engagement in development effectiveness for CSOs it rather became a starting point for engagement in the development effectiveness agenda.

# How to assess the implementation of the development effectiveness agenda

This report aims at establishing the degree to which Swedish CSOs actually implement the development effectiveness agenda and what challenges they meet in doing so. A mixed method approach was used including semi-structured interviews, qualitative text analyses of background reports on aid effectiveness in general as well as on CSO development effectiveness in particular, and evaluations.

Interviews were made with 11 CSOs in different sectors on their implementation of development effectiveness principles. The material studied includes suggested documents presented in the terms of reference as well as documents from the vast literature available on development effectiveness.

The decision to conduct a qualitative study, in this case through text analytical desk study, is

based on the reason for allowing the report to have an emphasis on words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2012). This allows it to go into detail and deeper context than a quantitative study would do. The research questions are open-ended.

There is no lack of principles and indicators set up to measure actual performance by the relevant actors. The report focuses on the principles agreed upon within GPEDC for all actors both on the donor as well as recipient sides, the special principles worked out by the CSO community itself the so called Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness and finally the specific principles for reporting to Sida presented in the guiding principles for Sida's engagement with and support of civil society.

## The Global Partnership principles

As outlined above, the GPEDC was established to ensure all development actors deliver on their commitments that development cooperation is genuinely eradicating poverty and bringing about sustainable development. The Global Partnership reports on progress through 10 indicators that capture the essence of the four internationally agreed principles for effective development co-operation: country ownership; focus on results; inclusive partnerships; and transparency and mutual accountability.

The current framework was established in 2012 and was

**Indicator 1a.** Development partners use country-led results frameworks deliver development co-operation.

**Indicator 1b.** Countries strengthen their national results frameworks.

**Indicator 2.** Civil Society organisations operate within an environment that maximises their engagement in and contribution to development.

**Indicator 3.** Quality of public-private dialogue.

**Indicator 4.** Information on development co-operation is publicly available.

**Indicator 4b.** Transparency of development co-operation at country level.

**Indicators 5a and 5b.** Development co-operation is predictable: annual and medium-term predictability.

**Indicator 6.** Development co-operation is included in budgets subjected to parliamentary oversight.

**Indicator 7.** Inclusive, transparent mutual assessment reviews are in place.

**Indicator 8.** Countries have transparent systems in place tracking public allocations for gender equality.

**Indicator 9a.** Quality of Countries' Public Financial Management Systems.

**Indicator 9b.** Development partners use countries' own public financial management systems to implement their co-operation programs with partner governments.

**Indicator 10.** Aid is untied. (GPEDC, 2019)

used during the 2014 and 2016 monitoring rounds. In 2017-2018, the framework was refined to reflect the challenges of the 2030 Agenda and is being rolled out in the 2018 monitoring round (GPEDC, 2019,2). The expectations for the New York meeting were low prior to the meeting, since the importance of the GPEDC had been down-played by many governments. For example, the German government had tried to call the biannual progress report a "working paper". However, being hosted at the UN turned out to be a good move. The access and space for CSOs at the GPEDC was clearly better than within the UN system. Attendance was high and commitments renewed. There was an open window to engage closer with UNDP and OECD/DAC who have been re-committed to the agenda with the new leadership. For the next meeting in 2022, changes to follow up are planned and the next monitoring round will therefore be in question. While CSOs continue to press for upholding the development effectiveness agenda the bilateral governments seem to be less and less interested.

## Principles for civil society

After a two-year consultative process and several international meetings, CSOs, partners, governments, traditional donors, South-South co-operators, emerging national economies, and private donors agreed on eight principles for development effectiveness.

These principles for CSO development effectiveness, approved in Istanbul in 2010, are called The Istanbul Principles and form the foundation for the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness and the Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

The Istanbul Principles set a standard for how CSOs should carry out their work and provide guidelines on how to improve development results. Applying these Principles is supposed to assist in holding partners as well as CSOs accountable to a shared standard. It helps to explain to donors what they can expect when they support CSOs to carry out development initiatives. It establishes credibility for the international development sector at all levels – community partners, public, governments, and funders (BCCIC, 2014).

## THE ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES

- Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women's and girls' rights.
- Respect and promote human rights and social justice.
- Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership, and participation.
- Promote environmental sustainability.
- Practice transparency and accountability.
- Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity.
- Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning.
- Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

### Guiding Principles for Sida's engagement with and support to civil society

Swedish support to the civil society in its work for international development has been part of Swedish development cooperation policy from the beginning. This engagement that is being administered by Sida has been regulated in Guiding Principles for Sida's engagement with and support to Civil Society from the 1960s forward to date. The latest update of those principles is from 2019. These guiding principles aim at assisting staff at Sida and Swedish missions abroad to engage with and support civil society in more aid and development effective ways but also serve as a source of inspiration for other development partners (Sida, 2019).

The guiding principles address topics such as overall design of civil society portfolios, selection of partners and funding modalities, methods to follow up support to CSOs and how to engage in donor-CSO dialogues. They intend to facilitate the planning, implementation, and follow-up of Swedish development cooperation strategies within a context of shrinking space for civil society. The guiding principles can also offer a bridge between Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance and Sida's system for management of individual contributions.

The principles are supposed to guide Sida towards a more effective cooperation with civil society. It is an attempt

to answer the questions most frequently asked, based on good practice, and Sida's interpretation of what constitutes aid and development effective engagement with and support to civil society (Sida, 2019).

### It centres on five guiding principles:

1. Sida should explore the various roles of civil society within their context
2. Sida should strive to support civil society in its own right
3. Sida should provide aid and development effective support to civil society partners
4. Sida should support civil society partners' efforts to strengthen their own development effectiveness, including their transparency and accountability
5. Sida should engage in continuous dialogue with civil society (Sida, 2019).

The fourth element, CSO development effectiveness, concerns what the CSOs themselves can do to enhance their effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. Ensuring CSO development effectiveness is a critical component to ensure development effectiveness more broadly. Success in the pursuit of CSO effectiveness and accountability may not only help to prevent donor and government efforts to over-regulate civil society but may also strengthen the social support needed to sustain civil society in the long term.

CSO development effectiveness is an area needing ongoing attention so that CSOs can better pursue accountability from governments with the strength of having "their own houses in order" and an ability to demonstrate high standards of governance and accountability within their organisations. Two areas are emphasised in the guiding principles to be followed by CSOs:

- Supporting demand-driven initiatives that respond to the priorities of CSOs' constituencies. That way, local ownership and accountability towards constituencies are placed at the centre.
- Increased efforts to strengthen their effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. At the core of the endeavours are the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness. The implementation of the Istanbul Principles is supported by various

toolkits and guidelines. As the Istanbul Principles are applied it will be important to continue to pay attention to some of the key outstanding challenges regarding CSO effectiveness and support CSOs to address them. These challenges include CSOs' internal management and governance; co-ordination and information sharing across CSOs, with governments and with the general public; results monitoring and reporting; and ensuring demand-driven programming (Sida, 2019).

### **What measures to use in an assessment**

As can be seen from the discussion above, there is no lack of principles that CSOs are expected to consider in their efforts to work with partners in poverty alleviation. In addition to the principles discussed above there are also a number of indicators to measure outcome of development effectiveness. GPEDC has developed a number of such indicators to measure the implementation of its principles and a special toolkit has been developed to put the Istanbul Principles into practice. The sheer amount of principles and indicators makes it exceedingly difficult for

any actor to know how exactly to manoeuvre to do the right thing. Most principles are also very general in nature and therefore difficult to apply in specific situations. An additional challenge is that a prerequisite for applying many of the principles is a solid Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting (PMER) process and quality and accountability system, where the principles can be adapted and included. Systems that many CSOs lack and which puts them at disadvantage.

As this report is qualitative in nature, it does not go in-depth into each and every indicator and whether it has been fulfilled or not. Rather, it uses a more analytical approach to try to understand how each CSO deals with overall principles and how they relate to their partners in recipient countries. The interview questions are therefore mainly dealing with the general principles of ownership, results, inclusive partnerships, transparency and accountability and less with detailed information gathered through indicators. Gender equality and equity as well as people's empowerment, democratic ownership, and participation (from the Istanbul Principles) are also discussed.



Members of the Amazon Theatre Group in a meeting in Manyatta-Kisumu. Amazon Theatre is one of ForumCiv's partners that uses theatre for educative community outreach. Credit: Alamin Mutunga/ForumCiv.

# Findings

Based on the background described in the previous chapters, 11 major Swedish CSOs were interviewed on how the development effectiveness agenda is being implemented today. The selection of the interviewees covered the main organisations delivering development support from Sweden today. All receive a major part of their financing from Sida and therefore have to comply with the Guiding Principles for Sida's Engagement with and Support to Civil Society.

**"There is a fine balance in making recommendations to our partners on how to work without getting too much involved in their business and take over their agenda."**

**AFRIKAGRUPPERNA**



## Defining development effectiveness

The 2005 Paris Declaration and later the one in Busan in 2011 defined aid effectiveness in five and four points, respectively. All these points referred to methodology and not to content. Instead, they referred to the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs for content and after 2015, the Agenda 2030. With the increased engagement of the CSO community from Accra 2008 and onwards, particularly after Busan 2011, the concept of aid effectiveness changed towards a wider concept of development effectiveness. The 2010 Istanbul Principles thus lists the original concepts of methodology but adds a number of points which concerns more the content of aid such as equality, sustainable development, and human rights. The reason for this as clearly stated was that these points were seen as prerequisites for implementing the methodology points. This report concentrates on the methodology questions. It should however be emphasised that when it comes to the points raised in the Istanbul Principles relating to content, all interviewees showed a high level of engagement and compliance to the principles.

What has become increasingly important in the past few years is ownership for whom. This is particularly so when there is a chain of actors from the donor to the ultimate aid beneficiary. Is it the ownership of the Swedish CSO, its partner organisation in the recipient country, the government of a recipient country, or the ultimate beneficiary? Another important question influencing ownership is the trend towards more authoritarian states in the world and the resulting shrinking space for civil society in these countries.

## Sida support requires a rights-based approach

Over time, Sida's support to the CSO community, (Swedish, international, and local), has changed considerably in terms of its content. Originally maintaining the objective of promoting a vital and pluralistic society in general, justified the funding of any civil society actor for any kind of activity, including service delivery (Billing, 2011). This is no longer the case. Services can only be delivered if it is part of a rights-based approach project. According to the guiding principles from 2019, all support channelled via CSOs should be made according to the rights-based approach which is developed as follows:

*"First and foremost, for Sida, the primary potential CSO partners would be those that focus on opportunities for people living in poverty and under oppression to improve their living conditions and do so based on the perspectives of people living in poverty and a human rights-based approach. Second, when working towards this objective, the aim is to strengthen civil society: that is, to focus on capacity development. Support is meant to improve the capability of CSOs to contribute to sustainable development, as many collective voices, and as providers of services. Thus support will be provided for both the organizational development of the partner CSO itself, and for activities where the partner CSO develops the capacity of rights holders and accompanies them as they engage in advocacy and assists them to improve their living conditions."*

*(Sida 2019)*

A large proportion, (almost 40 per cent) (OECD/DAC 2018), of Sida support is today channelled through CSOs that are mainly Swedish but also international and local and many departments at Sida headquarters and offices at Swedish embassies are involved in handling this support. Some of the latter do not always follow the principles referred to above in detail. This is particularly true in the field of humanitarian assistance, but also in other cases supported directly by embassies or by CSOs own funds. However, the principle that all support going via CSOs should adhere to the principle of the rights-based approach is especially important for making any assessment on the implementation of the development effectiveness agenda. If adhered to properly, the rights-based approach implies ownership by final beneficiaries through their participation in planning, implementation, and evaluation of any supported activity.

The rights-based approach is in itself a very wide concept and can be understood and implemented very differently. It is more straightforward for some of the CSOs that are directly engaged in defending the rights of a specific group such as children, (Save the Children), the LGBTI community, (RFSU), or women (Kvinna till Kvinna). For others

engaged in more crosscutting endeavours, it can be more complicated. Support to workers via trade unions, (Union to Union), for example, can be more difficult to justify as a strategy to reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable in countries where the majority make their living in the informal sector. It might be the best long-term approach to support better functioning trade unions to create an enabling environment for workers' rights that in the longer run will allow also less well-organised trade unions to develop and work for their member's rights. In assessing the way different CSOs implement the rights-based approach, utmost care must be taken with each CSOs particularity and the context within which they operate.

### **Partnership and ownership**

In defining development effectiveness in their practical work, all CSOs interviewed gave highest priority to the concept of partnerships. The whole idea of their work and their missions is to support their partners in their specific fields to combat poverty and fight for the rights of target groups. For most, their rationale is therefore based on partnerships. To find the right partner therefore becomes the most important vehicle to fulfil their missions. The selection process of partners and how to monitor that the partner lives up to its important role as a watchdog for upholding the rights of the target group becomes therefore their most important task.

Most of the CSOs interviewed do not themselves enter into implementation with final target groups but work through partner organisations. They all place considerable emphasis on supporting partners in their work towards target groups through capacity building activities such as training workshops, dialogue support, and regular discussions on how implementation reflects the interests of target groups. Ownership therefore becomes to a great extent a question of strengthening partners in their work towards target groups. The Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment referred to above underlines demand-driven programming to ensure development effectiveness. This takes place at the level of partner organisations for the CSOs interviewed.

How do they then take the question of ownership of target groups into consideration in their work? Here, CSOs differ



*"Financial support is of course key. However, as a partner, you can add value to partnerships by sharing your network, providing platforms for influencing or knowledge sharing, by being an ally when security situations, for example, may deteriorate and activists are threatened."*

**RFSU**

*"You could say that the result agenda during a big part of 2010s did put partnership and ownership on hold. A demand agenda that led to control and auditing rather than trust and true cooperation."*

**OLOF PALME INTERNATIONAL CENTER**

*"We can of course in such cases in the form of dialogue bring up questions which are important for us, like democratic development and equality, but more important is that we share values making it possible to understand each other and work together. "*

**UNION TO UNION**

*"There is a fine balance in making recommendations to our partners on how to work without getting too much involved in their business and take over their agenda."*

**AFRIKAGRUPPERNA**

*"We always have children's rights in focus and work with child rights programming where children are included in planning and implementation of our support."*

**SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN**

*"What is also particularly important for such innovative support is that you have your own staff on the ground i.e. presence. And that is not always the case."*

**DIAKONIA**

considerably. Some make a special point in that they only work directly with partner organisations, (Afrikagrupperna). They take target groups into consideration, but only through close scrutiny on how partners work with target groups in selection processes and in the monitoring and evaluation of projects supported. If the interests of target groups are not taken into sufficient consideration by a given partner, CSOs will enter into serious discussion with the partner and if not listened to, withdraw its support and establish collaboration with another partner.

Other CSOs engage more directly in the work of partner organisations through their local offices to engage target groups in project implementation, (Save the Children, RFSU, We Effect, Diakonia, Plan International Sweden). They work through their partners but seek to be more actively involved to ensure that target groups are involved. This is of course a very delicate balance: having an active role without questioning the integrity of a partner origination. Some CSOs go even further, experimenting with working directly with groups that tend not organise themselves into formal groups, (Diakonia, Plan International Sweden). Both these organisations have developed close relationships with such groups which, after long discussions, have been accepted by Sida. For Diakonia, the very informal working methods with target groups developed in Guatemala supported by the Swedish embassy has required considerable ingenuity and falls outside most reporting and monitoring rules. It was stressed that “presence” and continuity of CSOs over a longer period were key conditions for developing such innovative new approaches.

In addition to engagement with partners, some CSOs also engage in advocacy of decision makers and politicians in their respective fields with the goal of strengthening the rights of target groups. This is done either through their local offices or regional or international organisations, (Union to Union, Save the Children). They emphasise that this can be a rather sensitive matter and has to be done with care so as not to put their partners into difficult situations. In the past few years, with shrinking space for the civil society to act particularly in fields which are seen as threatening to governments, this has become increasingly difficult.

## **Harmonisation and alignment**

As stated above, all interviewees stressed partnership as the vehicle for ownership to combat poverty and thus an important measure for reaching development effectiveness. Most did, however, mention harmonisation or alignment as important in particular to achieve established goals in their field of action where other donors/actors were engaged. Some were involved in highly sensitive fields where concerted actions were required, and different actors had to cooperate to avoid problems in implementation. Other actors often had strongly diverging views on issues of ownership and the participation of target groups in the implementation of projects which can lead to exceptionally challenging situations and difficulties in actually reaching target groups through specific actions. In some cases, these differences of approach can hit CSOs directly, for example when collaborating internationally, (Save the Children, Union to Union). Alignment was discussed less in the interviews. Act Church of Sweden, however, did work within its international network to align procedures from requests, to agreements and reporting requirements, to avoid recipient organisations and countries having to meet a wide variety of different ways of dealing with the donor community.

**“Increased harmonisation between all donors is needed so that recipients do not have to deal with thousands of different systems at the same time.”**

*Olof Palme International Center*

## **Core support**

In its guiding principles, Sida emphasises the mode of core funding of local partner organisations as an important means to strengthen local ownership, their organisational systems and processes, and provide flexibility to respond to unforeseen events. Some interviewees found this to be the most important if not the only point made by Sida in terms of development effectiveness. The reaction to this drive has been fundamentally different between CSOs. Some have welcomed the initiative and have made this their major mode of support, (Afrikagrupperna); while



others have found it difficult to implement. A special group consisting of a number of major CSOs have looked into how to implement core support and have produced a report which has been presented to Sida for comments and clarifications (Guide for Core Support Management, February 2020).

Most of the CSOs interviewed are positive to the idea of core support and see how it fits with the idea of strengthening partners and their ownership of their development efforts. However, they see a number of difficulties in its practical implementation. The main obstacle raised by most interviewees is the requirement to report results. They all acknowledge the clear shift in report requirement from Sida in recent years away from detailed reporting on project level; project by project towards a more generalised type of reporting. However, they are still uncertain as to how far Sida is prepared to go and have almost all felt that not everybody with whom they cooperate at Sida really accept more open reporting. This, in combination with internal requirements for reporting to their own organisations and boards, and media scrutiny, makes them wary of entering the core support process. In most cases do they however express their willingness to try and have already started with core support on a pilot basis. For a more serious implementation they all however are looking forward to further clarifications from Sida.

### **Doing development differently**

All interviews discussed how reporting requirements had moved in the past five years from being extremely strict (result agenda) to being more open (Vähämäki, 2017). This process has been overwhelming for all parties involved and has led to serious rethinking within the donor community. How to move from focusing on project level to process, how to allow for partners and target groups to be more involved in the initiation, planning, implementation and monitoring of activities, and how to become more context-oriented? A number of new methods have been developed within the donor community under different headings, in particular “Doing Development Differently” (DDD) (Horst et al, 2020). However, strikingly little effort has been made to look back to see how similar situations were dealt with in the past.

All interviewees welcomed this development and stressed how important this was for major donors including Sida. However, few saw any new aspects in these methods suitable for their own use. In fact, they all said that they had worked according to DDD for many years and that those methods did not add much to the way they already think and work. Indeed, when the CSOs described in detail how they implemented various activities, many of the points stressed within DDD were remarkably similar in essence to how they already work.

### **Transparency and accountability**

Managing for results and mutual accountability were already part of the Paris Agenda while transparency and accountability received special attention first in the agreements made in Busan. In fact, for a large part of the donor community this issue became the essence of development effectiveness during most of the 2010s. The major shift from Paris to Busan became the shift of focus from the recipient to the donor in implementing these concepts. Sida also underlines the importance of these concepts in its recently released Guiding Principles, emphasising that “CSOs own development effectiveness, including their transparency and accountability” should be strengthened (Sida, 2019).

From the interviews, it became clear that this trend had been accepted by the CSOs and been incorporated into their working methods. The reason for this acceptance was however not always the same as the ones advocated by Sida. Three reasons why transparency and accountability are seen as important to respective CSOs can be determined from the interviews:

- To meet reporting requirements towards Sida and other donors
- To create an image of being an effective and trustworthy organisation towards their boards and leadership and the general public and funders
- To create a good and trusting relationship with their partners and targets groups

During much of the past ten years, the emphasis has been on the first two reasons primarily due to pressure from donors. In recent years, more effort has been made to-

wards improving relationships and image with regards to partners and target groups. This was seen as part of their efforts to improve their partnerships making the partner taking over more of the responsibility for planning, implementation and monitoring of their joint projects working for better sustainability.

What also has become increasingly important are relationships with governments and officials in recipient countries. Within decreasing space for civil society, governments have imposed a growing number of requirements on CSOs, pushing for increased transparency and accountability from them. Governments that are becoming more authoritarian feel threatened by CSOs whose mission is to advocate for the rights of people who are under pressure from the government (OECD, 2017 and Sida, 2017). Foreign interventions in support of local civil society is therefore seen as a threat to government policies and must be stopped or at least made more difficult to implement.

The expectation from all these different actors, with conflicting aims, has made life more complicated for CSOs and must be considered in planning and implementation of their programmes.

### **Effects of Covid-19**

The interviews were held at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although this was not a major theme of this report, all interviewees did take up the issue of how the pandemic affected their daily work both directly and indirectly. For partners, and in particular target groups, already suffering from poverty and lack of recourses, the effects were very real and devastating. All projects were affected in one way or the other and CSOs had to meet requests for adjusting projects due to the pandemic and also reallocate funds originally not earmarked for disaster relief. This of course affected those CSOs that were already primarily engaged in humanitarian support, although all reported being affected in one way or another. The main preoccupation was to get donors, and in particular Sida, to make the necessary changes to meet immediate demands from partners – a cry for flexibility. In most cases, CSOs were satisfied with the response from donors to date. They also acknowledged the additional funds that had been set aside for fighting the negative effects of the pandemic.

### **Sida and the CSO community**

For most of the CSOs interviewed, Sida is their major source of funding. Some are completely dependent on Sida, (ForumCiv), while others rely on other sources mainly of their own, (Save the Children, Act Church of Sweden). Also the counterparts at Sida differ from CSO to CSO. The most important funding mechanism at Sida is the department administering support to CSOs own projects (CIVSAM). Counterpart funding from the CSO is here generally required, presently at 10%. Other Sida departments allocate funds to CSOs for their implementation of specific projects on behalf of Sida. This can be in many different fields such as humanitarian support, support in the fields of democracy and human rights, environment, etc. To really understand and to be able to assess the relation between Sida and the CSOs a full recapitulation of the history of Swedish development cooperation would be necessary (Billing, 2011). However, this will not be recapitulated here. What can be said is that there has been a major shift in that relationship over time, with the peak of influence by the CSO community in both policy and implementation in the 1960s and 70s to a complete reversal during the period of “the results agenda” from 2012 onwards. As shown above, we are now in a period where a shift away from that towards more trusting cooperation between the parties.

The relationship between Sida and CSOs came up again and again. This is of course understandable as the requirements and rules of the game are set by the major funding agency, i.e. Sida; and the actors relying on these resources have to adjust to these rules. In other words, the norms and rules of the game are set by Sida. Within Sida, CIVSAM is the responsible unit for the interactions with the CSO community. However, CSOs interact with many parts of Sida and sometimes the rules within their spheres do not fully correspond with the ones of CIVSAM. In addition, other groups within Sida such as lawyers, controllers, and auditors follow their instructions which do not always correspond with the norms set by CIVSAM. The extremely prolonged discussions on one of Plan International Sweden’s projects for informal groups of youth is a case in point.

The views expressed in the interviews did take up both



"Narrative reporting requirements from Sida have eased, but financial reporting requirements have increased, and this is still a challenge for us. We would like to find ways for partners and end-users of our support to be more involved in results work through the whole chain and make accountability become as important "downwards" as it is "upwards". My experience with Sida is that you sometimes get different messages which risks contribute to uncertainties as regards to what is genuinely applicable when it comes to e.g. increasing aid effectiveness."

**SWEDISH MISSION COUNCIL (SMC)**

"There has been a radical shift during the past years from control and result agenda towards more of reflection and learning. Sida could shift further towards having a stronger priority on downward accountability rather than upward accountability. That would shift the power dynamics to the rights-holders to a greater degree."

**RFSU**

"We have to steer our support to partners more than before. For example, we have to cut down the number of countries where we implement our projects and focus the remaining projects to particular countries and regions. "

**UNION TO UNION**

"CIVSAM understands what we are supposed to do, while other parts of Sida have greater difficulty in losing control and not requesting detailed reporting."

**OLOF PALME INTERNATIONAL CENTER**

"What in the end has a decisive influence on how we form our support to partners are the regulations of CIVSAM."

**UNION TO UNION**

small and big questions when it comes to these interactions. The main questions relate to the slow but steady shift in reporting requirements implemented in recent years. There is no doubt that this shift is seen positively and with great relief by the CSOs interviewed. The highly detailed reporting requirements of the period of the result agenda affected CSOs to a great extent and made their work with partners exceptionally difficult. The new requirements again make it possible to allow partners and target groups to participate in the process thus allowing for more ownership of the process.

While the shift in itself was seen by all as a positive development, there were many views on how this shift was being implemented. The comments varied considerably; some were more positive than others. Very often it came down to basic questions such as personal relationships and the quality of the dialogue. A feeling that came through was that when Sida had experienced personnel on their side dialogue very often led to acceptable compromises. Some of the people involved seem however to have been so influenced by the reporting requirements from the period of the results agenda, that this still influenced their views today. Also, a degree of internal contradiction could be detected by Sida personnel, on the one hand advocating the principles of DDD taking the context into consideration in implementation taking more initiatives and thereby risks on the other hand keeping to detailed reporting project by project. In some cases, norm-setting and development of policies were made by one group within Sida and control and follow up was done by another, with both groups not always pulling in the same direction. Many examples of this internal contradiction were raised in the interviews. The question of core support was taken up by most interviewees as an example of this (see above). However, many examples of how such complications have led to good and acceptable compromises through dialogue were also raised. The CSOs who tries to experiment the most and are open to new ideas and initiatives are the once who can give the most examples of the internal contradictions within Sida.

### **Sharing of financial risks**

As already discussed in the section above, a major issue raised in most interviews was Sida's insistence, in spite of



its innovative and context-specific approaches to development projects, of not taking any of the risk involved in this new approach. It is an established fact that development cooperation if well implemented does imply taking risks. This has been said again and again in the history by most actors concerned among them the Sida leadership. However when it comes to practical collaboration with partners Sida is neither prepared nor allowed to take any risks. This is a major problem that most interviewees bring up as an obstacle for implementing innovative new methods.

“There is a need to have a more comprehensive approach from Sida in order to get their priorities right; if you want to stimulate innovation and new ways of working, you also need to ensure that there are incentives in place to stimulate that. As it is today the political decision by the leadership within Sida is not followed by a change in terms and conditions. For example, there is still not a clarity in terms of financial risk-sharing. Other stumbling-blocks are strict regulations and instructions that are required by accountants and controllers and the lack of messaging that in order to be innovative, Sida needs to be willing to take risks, not only NGOs.”

RFSU.

**“The bottom line still rests on who takes the final risks when something goes wrong.”**

*Olof Palme International Center*

# Conclusions and recommendations

This report investigates how Swedish CSOs work with development effectiveness. At the same time, efforts were made to identify obstacles and opportunities in the implementation of development effectiveness principles to find potential improvements.

The first question is whether CSOs follow the many principles of development effectiveness presented above. As shown in the introduction, this is not a simple question to answer. Development effectiveness is defined by a large number of principles developed in the Paris Agenda, in the Busan Protocol and in the Istanbul Principles. These principles can be divided into those relating to methodology and those relating to content or as was stated in the Istanbul Principles “underlying requirements for development effectiveness”. For the ones relating to content the interviews did confirm a high level of compliance. Some to an extent that they had made these their overriding priorities. We Effect, for example, have “Equality first” as a leading theme in their strategy.



## Partnership and ownership

As regards the methodological principles which this report looked more deeply into, compliance was more diverse. Out of the many applicable principles, it seems that the CSOs interviewed emphasised some more than others. Or to be more precise, they found some of the criteria more relevant for them than the others. All interviewees did put partnership on top of the list as a means to accomplish ownership. Partnership was seen as their specific way of working. In reaching out with their specific objectives and missions they needed good and trustworthy partners to do the work on the ground. The relationship to those partners became therefore especially important. The partners were also the vehicles to reach out to the ultimate beneficiaries and ensure their ownership. This reasoning was implicitly or explicitly part of every CSOs theory of change.

From the important relationships with partners, two major observations can be made. The first relates to the question on how to uphold the necessary good relationships with partners and at the same time act as a donor requesting for good implementation of agreed programmes and require control and reporting. The second is to see to that the final beneficiaries are always highest on the agenda in spite having a partner as an intermediary. These two points are difficult to implement in practice but must always be taken into serious consideration.

**Ownership** with regard to partner organisations seems well developed and thought through. For many CSOs, further work on how to allow for more ownership for ultimate target groups and beneficiaries should be sought.

## Harmonisation and alignment

These two principles were not so much discussed by the CSOs. All did acknowledge their importance but for most they did not seem to be sufficiently relevant to their operations. Cooperation with other donors or institutions could sometimes be especially important and many did refer to the problems from many actors making different requirements from the recipients. Most interesting was the intervention from Save the Children who operates with an international umbrella organisation on how to deal with different approaches when it comes to requirements and values. On the whole it would be advisable for the CSOs to give more thoughts to this question in their planning

and implementation in the future. Lack of coordination and alignment to the rules and systems of the country in question can make life overly complicated for the recipient on all levels and lead to major problems also for the CSOs in their effort to give support effectively.

Although Sida funds can only be used to cooperate with CSOs, more thought has to be put on how this support integrates or clashes with government policies and activities. This becomes more important and challenging as governments in all parts of the world increasingly engage in the control of international and local CSOs, political parties, and media through the introduction of laws, policies, and practices that restrict political space, (see below). CSOs are important actors in their own right and play a crucial role as watchdogs as well as work to promote and defend the human rights that now are threatened. Hence alignment and harmonisation with government policies become much more complicated. Policy dialogue and cooperation between donors, international NGOs and CSOs, can also contribute to that an authoritarian government perceive the local CSO as a prolonged arm of western governments/civil society. If CSOs are limited to align with government policies and deliver development projects and programmes, their role as watchdogs can be compromised. It is essential to acknowledge the different and complementary roles of different actors.

**Harmonisation and alignment** should be better integrated into CSO plans, activities, and methods, to reduce burdensome administrative processes as part of the development effectiveness agenda. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that CSOs are actors in their own right and that it is a challenge on the policy side to align and harmonise with governments that limit political space. Experiences from the anti-apartheid struggle might be of use in this regard.

## Transparency and accountability

These points were also high on the agenda for all of the CSOs interviewed. This mirrors the demand from the donors including Sida and from their own boards and members. A strong demand for being accountable towards their partners and beneficiaries was also expressed. The changes that Sida today opens for in the reporting

requirements allow for greater accountability towards the beneficiaries in a way that had not been possible for many years. This opportunity should be used by all CSO to allow for greater control and ownership by their partners and beneficiaries.

**Transparency and accountability** must in addition to the funders and the CSOs own organisations also increasingly address partner organisations and the target groups.

### **Core support**

While Sida puts high priority on core support as a measure to increase ownership of the partners and beneficiaries only some of the CSOs interviewed did use this mode so far. The major reason for this reluctance was the perceived non-correspondence with Sida rules and requirements. Other reasons stated were the risks they saw in introducing core support and loss of control. However most of them did participate in the joint working group on core support and were experimenting with its introduction. An open dialogue with Sida is needed to overcome some of the hesitation felt by the CSOs. In this dialogue Sida must make some clarifications and possibly also some concessions. See more below under sharing financial risks.

Serious consideration should be made by all concerned CSOs to include **core support** in the tool box for supporting partner organisations. The ongoing collaboration between CSOs is commendable, but perhaps learning from each other's experiences could be even further improved. The outstanding problems in introducing more core support must be resolved with Sida.

### **Reporting requirements towards Sida**

During the period of the result agenda reporting requirements became so stringent that they did dominate the relationship between CSOs and donors. This is presently changing considerably. Sida is here the leading agency when it comes to practical implementation while many others (e.g. EU) are lagging behind. From the interviews it is quite clear that much still has to be done in order for the CSOs to be confident in dealing with Sida and dare to allow their partners and the end-user to take over the responsibility for planning, implementation and particularly

reporting of their own activities. Sida has to be transparent with their norms, requirements and controls and all Sida representatives have to work in the same direction. It might be partly a question of image, but findings from the interviews suggest a lack of coordination and coherence within Sida between different units. The CSOs have to take up a dialogue with Sida in which they acknowledge what Sida has done so far but make clear what they see as the problems in the interaction.

It is of utmost importance that the CSOs and Sida **agrees on the norms and rules** regulating their interactions to avoid unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings that hampers effectiveness and that these are implemented in a transparent and similar way by all actors involved.

### **Sharing the financial risks**

One of the major problems when it comes to the relationship between the CSOs and Sida (and any other donor) is the fact that while most parties agree that development cooperation implies taking risks to allow for long-term development including attitudinal changes the CSOs takes all the financial risks while Sida takes none. This question should be reviewed. It became acute in meeting the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the demands for new and changed activities on all levels and with regards to most of the CSOs involved; to such a degree that the requirement for the ten percent self-financing was lifted. The demand for flexibility became increasingly important thereby also the demand for sharing the financial risks if something should go wrong in the process. The dialogue between the CSOs and Sida should include the question of flexibility and risk sharing. In such a discussion also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant embassies needs to participate.

Continue the initiated discussion on sharing **financial risks** between Sida and the CSOs, in particular when efforts are made to work with innovative ideas in difficult countries.

### **Innovations to better reach the target group**

A major preoccupation by the donors today is to what extent a donor such as Sida should channel their support mainly via Swedish CSOs or directly to local CSOs or

direct to the beneficiaries/informal organisations. This discourse was high on the agenda in the 1970s and 1980s but changed during the period of the result agenda as it became increasingly difficult for the donors to enforce accountability to the local CSOs leaving this difficult question to the intermediary of the Swedish CSOs. This question does not fall under the mandate of this report and was only indirectly raised in the interviews.

The underlying question of finding new innovative ways to reach people living in poverty and marginalisation and to increase their ownership of their own development was however discussed extensively. All the CSOs interviewed struggled with this question and presented many interesting innovative ways of tackling them. Some had over the years developed new approaches of their own. The problems of introducing new innovative ideas collided with their own norms and regulations of the respective CSO, practical problems on the ground to relate to groups of people who were not used to organise themselves and most importantly with the rules and regulation of the donors (Sida).

The new efforts to engage directly with unorganised youth (Plan International) the new ways of directly interacting with local labour unions (Union to Union) and Diakonia's new approach in Guatemala are examples of efforts to find new direct access to the target group with or often without local partner organisations involvement.

**Innovations** with regard of reaching target groups should be high on the agenda for all CSOs. Learning from past experience and from each other should lead the work. An initial activity could be to convene a seminar with all interested CSOs where the three projects mentioned above and other of similar innovative nature are presented for peer review and discussion and dissemination of knowledge between the CSOs.

### **Dealing with shrinking space for civil society**

As was discussed in the introduction the world has in the past years become more complicated and disaster prone of both human and natural kind. The present pandemic is only one case in point. The number of authoritarian states has recently surpassed the number of democratic

states. For CSOs, the shrinking space for the civil society has made all kind of activities more difficult. This is especially true for those advocating the rights-based approach, defending values such as human rights, democracy, and equality. Extensive research has looked into this question and many recommendations have been made. Implementing far-reaching changes in aid practices has proven difficult, due to bureaucratic inertia, risk aversion, and narrower methods of monitoring and evaluation (Brenchenmacher and Carothers 2019).

There is however no easy way out of this problem if the goal is to assist poor people to uphold their rights and to improve their living conditions. The CSOs must therefore, in collaboration with the government and Sida and within their “drive for democracy” (GOS 2019:2020), find ways to make this possible. This has to be done in close collaboration, with partners, and particularly target groups always in mind. Development effectiveness is not an end in itself, but a means to be able to give support in the most efficient way to the poorest people with their rights at risk and to do that in the proper and most innovative ways in spite of obstacles on the way.

Develop a strategy together with the government and Sida to work against the authoritarianisation in the world and the **shrinking space for civil society**. This should include all necessary tools to improve conditions for the poor and oppressed in a difficult world. This endeavour should also include a strategy on the use of dialogue in challenging environments and building capacities for the future.

## Organisations contributing to the report through interviews

**ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN**

**AFRIKAGRUPPERNA**

**DIAKONIA**

**FORUMCIV**

**OLOF PALME INTERNATIONAL CENTER**

**PLAN INTERNATIONAL SWEDEN**

**RFSU**

**SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN**

**SWEDISH MISSION COUNCIL**

**UNION TO UNION**

**WE EFFECT**

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## **EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS**

This report investigates how Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) work with development effectiveness and its principles of ownership, results, inclusive partnerships and accountability and transparency.

In a complicated world with many global challenges, development effectiveness is more important than ever. To enable the honourable principles to be implemented, all actors have to cooperate and work for its proper implementation, and this requires dialogue, compromise, and flexibility.

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