

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

A study on development effectiveness and Swedish civil society organisations

This policy brief is a summary of a report on how Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) work with development effectiveness and its principles of ownership, inclusive partnerships, results, and accountability and transparency. These will be accounted for below together with the findings and recommendations.

The findings are based on interviews with eleven major CSOs and show that most of the principles have been introduced 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 CSOs surveyed. Questions of reporting results and the room for flexibility and innovation are areas that would benefit from more attention and work.

reach their objectives and missions. The partners are also the vehicles to reach the ultimate beneficiaries and ensure their ownership. One question discussed was how to uphold the necessary good relationships with partners and at the same time act as a donor requesting good implementation of agreed programmes and requiring control and reporting. Another was how to ensure that the final beneficiaries are always highest on the agenda when having a partner as an intermediary.

Recommendation: 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.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PARTNERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

Partnership is about transparent relationships between development actors. Ownership means that development priorities should be defined by recipients. All interviewees put partnership on top of the list as a means to accomplish ownership. Partnership is their specific way of working and reliable partners are needed to

Development cooperation must be transparent and based on mutual accountability between actors involved. Transparency and accountability were high on the agenda for the CSOs interviewed. This mirrors the demand from 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 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.

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

their role as watchdogs can be compromised. It is essential to acknowledge the different and complementary roles of different actors.

Recommendation: 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.

HARMONISATION AND ALIGNMENT

Harmonisation is about donors aligning policies and procedures for their support in order to avoid imposing varying and conflicting requirements on partners. Alignment is about donors seeking to align support with priorities set by partner countries and work through their systems. While all CSOs acknowledged the importance of these two principles few seem to find them sufficiently relevant to their operations. Lack of coordination and alignment to the rules and systems of the country in question can complicate the work of the recipient and lead to major problems for the CSOs in their effort to give support effectively. At the same time aligning support with government policies becomes more challenging as governments in all parts of the world increasingly engage in the control of international and local CSOs. If CSOs are limited to align with government policies and deliver development projects and programmes,

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS TOWARDS SIDA

The focus on results is about achieving sustainable impact and lasting change for people. During the period of the results agenda, strict reporting requirements came to dominate the relationship between CSOs and donors. This is now changing considerably and Sida is a leading donor agency in the practical implementation of this change. However, work remains to be done in order for CSOs to be confident in dealing with Sida and allowing their partners and the end-user to take over the responsibility for planning, implementation and particularly reporting of their own activities. Findings from the interviews suggest a lack of coordination and coherence between different units within Sida.



Recommendation: It is of utmost importance that the CSOs and Sida agree 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 the CSOs takes all the financial risks. This question should be reviewed. The demand for flexibility became increasingly important in meeting the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and 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. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant embassies also needs to participate in such a discussion.

Recommendation: 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.

CORE SUPPORT

Core support is un-earmarked funding and the most flexible way of supporting CSOs and their partners. Sida puts high priority on core support as a measure to increase ownership of the partners and beneficiaries but only a few 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 seen in introducing core support and loss of control. However, most of the CSOs did participate in the joint working group on core support and were experimenting with its introduction.

Recommendation: 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.

INNOVATIONS TO REACH THE TARGET GROUP

Finding new innovative ways to reach people living in poverty and marginalisation and to increase their ownership of their own development was discussed extensively. All the CSOs interviewed struggled with this question and presented innovative ways of tackling them. Some had over the years developed new approaches of their own. The problems of intro-



ducing 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.

Recommendation: 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 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. There is no easy way out of this problem if the goal is to assist people living in poverty 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", find ways to make this possible. This has to be done in close collaboration with partners, and particularly with target groups always in mind.

Recommendation: 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