



Norwegian People's Aid Partnership Policy



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Introduction to the Partnership Policy

Supporting peoples own agenda

Norwegian Peoples Aid has a longstanding tradition of closely linking our international solidarity work and cooperation with people's own initiatives and agendas. This implies the strengthening of their organisations as a strategy for the empowerment of people and communities, as well as for their ability to influence the conditions under which they live. Such focus and purpose are reflected in NPA's support of liberation movements and people's organisations in communities where open conflict exists as well as in societies in the process of democratisation. These intentions are also reflected in NPA's statements regarding its governing principles as well as in policy documents.¹

NPA's implementation of these principles relates to the purposes underlying the cooperation with our partners. NPA has a great deal of experience. We have seen that the manner in which we relate to, and cooperate with, locally based partner organisations is crucial also to our own purpose of supporting people's organizations and initiatives.

This document is a revised version of the earlier approved policy "*NPA's Partnership Cooperation in civil society*" that has been adapted to NPA's new Strategy for the International Programme 2008 – 2011. The strategy states that NPA will continue to work in *partnership*, first and foremost with civil society organisations. The strengthening of civil society is a key element in this strategy that aims at promoting democratization and an equitable distribution of power and resources.

This policy's focus is on *how* we understand and develop partnerships and *who* we establish partnerships with. In order to put our solidarity and partnership strategy into practice we need a continuous evaluation of who we should work with to promote the desired change. It is equally important to have a critical view on how partnerships are practiced especially in respect to power sharing and the development of more horizontal relationships. For NPA partnership is a two-way relationship with commitment from both sides where NPA should adapt to the local context, respect the partners agenda and leading role.

This policy document is intended as a tool in devising, designing and assessing Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) international cooperation programs. It includes definitions and criteria regarding NPA's approach to partnership cooperation. The second part of the document include an analysis of civil society that provide NPA's definitions, understanding and approach to the role of civil society organizations.

¹ "Principles and value basis for Norwegian People's Aid", adopted by NPA's General Assembly 22.06.03

NPA's approach to partnership

What does NPA mean by Partnership?

NPA sees partnership as a two-way cooperative relationship, sharing the complementary resources of various partners in terms of finance, skills, technology, information, knowledge of particular realities, and thus power – in order to fulfil their objectives related to oppressed social groups.

NPA's approach to partnership as a relationship:

1. NPA practises partnership with organisations that have compatible visions and values.
2. NPA promotes partnerships based on an active dialogue, mutual trust and accountability, openness, commitment, and respect for each other's autonomy, integrity and identity.
3. NPA recognizes that partnerships are context-specific and must adapt to local conditions with respect to values, economic, social, cultural and political conditions and the strength of civil society.
4. NPAs focus in the partnership process is on the type of partner organization and the role it plays in social and political processes. Projects are tools for agreed action within the partnership.
5. The partnership is subject to dynamic interactions, changes, and external factors, calling for continuous analysis of the context and the relationship.
6. NPA will respect the partner organisations agendas and their varying contexts, avoiding standardised approaches.
7. NPA aspires to have a supportive attitude and approach towards its partners, and aims at strengthening their leading role.
8. NPA acknowledges that varying access to resources and authority may create relationships of inequality between parties, and thereby a traditional donor-recipient relationship. NPA's cooperation with partners aims at reducing such imbalances.

Types of partners

NPA's international strategy 2008-2011 aims to strengthen and promote people's democratic rights, support organisations defending these rights, promote their participation and assist them in their struggle for an equitable distribution of power and resources. NPA identifies its partners among civil society organisations, first and foremost popular organisations.

Historically, NPA prefers to cooperate with organisations representing oppressed social groups such as liberation movements, community based organisations, and social organisations, either formal or informal in nature. This continues as a priority. In some cases, since selection of partners depends mainly on the local/national context, other types of organisations with compatible aims may be selected as partners (e.g.: intermediary NGOs, research institutions, media, lobby- and advocacy organisations).

NPAs core programme should be focused on strategic partnerships. Strategic partnerships are established with **actors** with whom we have an affinity in terms of vision and values and an agreed level of power sharing. For NPA this involves ongoing consultation and dialogue on policies and strategies as well as the application of the principles for partnership outlined above. A strategic partnership may also involve funding. NPA may also engage in project partnerships, providing funding for specific **activities** promoted by civil society organizations.

Scope of partnership

a. Partnership at different geographical levels:

Relationships with partners may be developed at different levels: local (community, municipality), provincial, national, regional, or global.

NPA's basic criterion for establishing partnerships at any level is the social anchoring of the organisation. However, the main objectives of the partnership might vary at different geographical levels or arenas. While partnerships on a local level may focus more on the strengthening of grass root participation, partnerships on a national or regional level might have a larger potential for multiplication of results and political influence.

b. Short-term and long-term partnerships

NPA should give priority to long-term partnerships involving social organizations and other partners; in such cases, organisational development usually constitutes a central component of the partnership. However, NPA should also support short-term campaigns with the aim of producing or communicating information, to engage in lobbying (e.g. for ratifying or amending a law) or to bring about short-term changes. In such cases, the focus is not organizational development but rather public awareness and the bringing about of specific changes.

Partnership phases

NPA's partnerships may encompass a range of phases: with or without funding, prior to, during, and following funding. Although financial support for partner organisations forms part of such cooperation, NPA intends to avoid focusing exclusively on a financial approach. Accompanying partner organisations goes beyond providing financial support.

When initiating a partnership, a relationship without direct funding or limited support to small-scale initiatives can facilitate the building of mutual trust. Limited support at the outset may make partners less dependent on NPA, avoiding traditional donor-recipient relationships.

Partnerships may continue through networking and advocacy as well as through the sharing of experience and skills between organisations, even after termination of financial support.

Defining and continuously reassessing the time frame for financial cooperation between NPA and the partner organisation may help to maintain focus on sustainability aspects. Lengthy periods of financial support may create dependency; on the other hand it must be assessed in relation to the aims and objectives to be achieved.

The assessment of sustainability should have an approach in which financial, social, political, and organisational aspects are addressed in an integrated manner. The achievement of sustainability should be measured in relation to the stated objectives of the project, the effect on wider social and political processes and on the role and strength of the partner organization itself. In most NPA projects it is not the activities that need to be sustainable, but the results, as for example a strengthened organization.

These challenges should be discussed with partner organisations at the beginning, during and at the end of the project cooperation, acknowledging that circumstances and conditions may undergo changes during the originally defined timeframe.

Non-funding aspects of a partnership

NPA sees partnership as a relationship that goes beyond mere funding and the way this relationship works should be constantly reviewed and subject to evaluation.

Learning from the dialogue with partners on their experience, knowledge and ideas concerning political context, organization, political influence, gender and development issues among others, is an important source for organizational development and improvement of NPAs work.

At the same time, NPA is committed to share with partners and partners may expect:

1. Political commitment, not neutrality, when supporting social processes and actors.
2. Awareness of the need for cultural and historical knowledge of relevant countries and regions
3. Clearly stated policies and priorities in order to ensure an understanding of NPA as a partner-organisation.
4. Sufficient capacity (i.e. ability to do) and competence (i.e. "understanding/knowledge of content") to accompany the partner organisations in accordance with its self-defined needs
5. Efforts to facilitate access to organizational development support when defined relevant by the partner organization.
6. Information sharing and facilitation of access to networks where NPA is involved or have contacts.

When cooperating with partner organisations, the role of NPA is to accompany the partners in their development efforts, and to carry out regular evaluation of the organisation with respect to the achievement of stated objectives. Accompaniment includes the locally defined and prioritised facilitation of financial and human resources.

In Norway as well as internationally, NPA will give priority to advocacy in its partnership-based cooperation. NPA voices its own policies through advocacy and lobbying activities and will keep partners informed. When relevant, NPA will seek input from partners to its advocacy work and may forward partners' viewpoints in Norway as well as internationally. In a partnership, joint advocacy may be agreed when policies coincide or NPA may also facilitate partners own advocacy initiatives. The parties should agree on roles and strategies related to each advocacy issue. Networking contributes to both advocacy and competence building through the establishment of contacts and the exchange of information, as well as toward providing opportunities for building and strengthening alliances.

Initiating and Developing Partnerships

The identification of whom we cooperate with is important to NPA. A central issue for NPA in assessing the possibility of becoming engaged in new initiatives is the following: *Does the programme/project, or the work we are to support, represent initiatives taken by organised oppressed people?* The answer to this question is crucial for the decision on initiating a partnership.

When initiating and developing a partnership, a context analysis assessing the role of the partner organizations within civil society and in wider social and political processes is necessary. NPA both need information on the nature, capacities and potential of the partner organization as well as to make information about NPA available to the potential partner. In addition, NPA's capacity and competence to accompany the specific partner should be taken into consideration.

Selection and assessment of partner organisations

Organisational assessment is central for NPA to get to know and understand a partner organization. This is basically carried out in two situations:

- a) when selecting a partner organisation or a partnership relation is established, and
- b) during an on-going partner relationship.

In both situations, the following organisational aspects shall be assessed:

- 1 The policy of the organisation:
 - its values
 - its capacity for analysing and relating to its context
 - degree of participatory defining of its own agenda
 - training of leaders and members
 - promotion of equal opportunities for men and women
 - its approach to cultural conflicts
 - policy on sustainability (including the approach to its social, political, and financial aspects)
- 2 The unity of the organisation:
 - levels of commitment and shared interests at various levels
 - real representation (of members or of external actors)
 - capacity to mobilise
 - level of internal communication/accountability towards members
 - transfer of knowledge between all levels.
- 3 Capacity to influence, have impact, and make changes:
 - capacity to assess strengths and weaknesses, and to combine a variety of approaches
 - capacity to communicate the organisation's message to media, mobilisation skills, negotiation skills, and the ability to wield influence
 - degree of consistency between the vision of the affiliates on the one hand and influence of the organisation on political agendas on the other.
 - capacity to maintain relevance and influence in changing contexts
- 4 Capacity to relate to, and make alliances with, other actors:
 - capacity to identify relevant actors at various levels (local, sectoral, national, international)
 - capacity to make alliances based on political agenda/interest in sharing experiences with others.
- 5 The technical and administrative competence of the organisation:
 - transparency
 - capacity to manage financial resources, elaborate proposals, and to manage activities and personnel
 - capacity to balance the management of service delivery and political agendas.

Selected partners are normally those that demonstrate coherence of policies and unity at the outset of a partnership with NPA. Shortcomings with respect to influence/impact, relations with other actors and technical/ administrative capacities are often focused upon as areas to be developed within the partnership.

NPA in civil society

Concepts

The concepts of civil society and civil society organisations have become relevant and important to international cooperation and to development policies. NPA is a part of civil society and the main part of our cooperation is with civil society organizations. Hence in this partnership policy we find it necessary to define and discuss the term “civil society” in the light of our policies and relevant experience.

For NPA, the term *civil society is value-neutral*; it is neither “good” nor “bad”. However, when identifying partners, the criteria will be whether they are “positive/negative” and “relevant/irrelevant” as actors in civil society. Civil society is often defined as “non-state” and “non-profit making”, or as a third sector intermediate between the state and the market. However, it has proved difficult to identify and categorise organisations as strictly profit-making or non-profit-making, state-dependent or state-independent.

It is common to distinguish between social sectors within society as “oppressed”, “poor”, “marginalised”, “popular”, “the people”, “workers”, “peasants”, “women” on the one side, and “wealthy”, “dominant” or “elite” on the other. Within these two main sectors we can find both groups that are passive and active in the public sphere. We will find that people’s organizations and active participation of popular sectors exist alongside oppressed peoples who are not organised or publicly active. Similar divisions may be found within the dominant sectors.

NPA’s overall definitions of civil society and civil society organizations are:

- *“Civil Society” is the public “sphere” in which ideological and political debate, influence and power, take place*
- *“Civil Society Organisations” are formal or informal non-governmental groups, organisations and institutions with a wider objective than profit-generation that are active in the public sphere.*

Civil society organizations are diverse. The term “civil society” is value neutral, but every civil society organisation represents values and policies. Their character and role in society will differ according to traditions and specific situation. From NPAs point of view, based on the experience gained in several countries during recent decades, it is possible to identify the following **positive** roles and impacts of civil society:

- *“Civil society” and “civil society organisations” can represent forces and spaces for countering the concentration of power and resources. It can be a space where alternative thoughts are developed, a space from which dictatorship is resisted, or a space for political, ideological, cultural and social struggle between opposing forces disputing hegemony within the society.*
- *Civil society may contribute to strengthen people’s participation and democratisation. Many transitional processes towards elected governments have not proven effective in ensuring political participation and democracy. However, a strong civil society may contribute to positive democratic development. Hence, in relation to international cooperation, civil society is often seen as a precondition and a contribution to democracy and development. Peoples’ participation is often reflected by the connection and link provided by civil society between citizens and the*

state, and lends collective force to the interests of citizens by enhancing public policies and changes in society that reflect popular opinions and visions. Hence, it can lend voice to people who are otherwise deprived of access to decision-making fora; people-based organisations can expand the outreach of democratic reforms. Civil society can also add diversity to what otherwise risks turning into one-sided decision-making processes. In itself, civil society can also be a medium of political socialisation – i.e. serve as “a school of democracy”.

- Democratisation at local and national levels is not distinct from the global level. Globalisation has implied increased concentration of power in fewer hands due to dominance and the absence of regulations. However, globalisation also provides individuals and organisations with fresh opportunities for establishing contacts and alliances. To shape democratic rules and institutions at local, national, regional and global level is a different challenge in globalized world. There are examples in which civil society organisations pursue a “cooperative” globalisation through dissemination of information to citizens, acting as “watch-dogs” to national and international authorities and corporations and promoting people’s insight and participation in international negotiations.

A variety of settings

The nature and function of civil society varies depending on traditions, structures and situations. Spending time and resources in analysing civil society environments is probably one of the keys to improving our cooperation skills. Hence NPA must dovetail its basic principles with analysis of the context when assessing opportunities and challenges.

In many cases *conflicts imply oppression* of the traditional civil society that goes underground, assumes a low profile, or finds other forms of organising and voicing people’s interests.

The legitimacy of the state as possessors of authority and power to regulate, judge and represent the will of society is challenged where rights are violated. Hence, in *serious conflict-situations*, civil society organisations are often perceived as alternatives to an oppressive state. This applies to occupied territories or in countries where there is no sovereign state. It also applies to dictatorships and other authoritarian regimes that do not acknowledge their obligations towards individual citizens or all sectors of the community. Civil society organisations may also be recognised as alternatives to the state when the latter fails to recognise its obligations and embarks on privatisation.

Societies in *transition to democracy* may pose fresh challenges to civil society. In some cases central civil society organisations assume the responsibilities of government. Relations and roles affecting the state and its citizens may undergo change.

A *post-conflict situation* may vary in accordance with traditional social structures existing prior to and post-conflict, the country’s political and cultural context, and the intensity of the conflict. Social and political arenas are often transformed following a conflict, and the character and objectives of Civil Society may consequently undergo change.

Civil society organisations may also contribute towards state-building processes, as in post conflict situations where national reconstruction and development processes may require transformation of a weak or authoritarian state. Civil society organisations may promote transparency, improved accountability, democracy, and pluralism.

NPA shall cooperate with organisations that promote democracy and an equitable distribution of resources, and;

- represent the interests of particular segments of society (ideological actors),
- contribute towards shaping public and corporate policies (exercise influence),
- raise public awareness, i.e. provide information concerning problems and their causes; promote public support for issues (sometimes in cooperation with state and/or market actors); and sensitise those involved by functioning as “a school for democracy”.
- mediate between those actively involved (conflict-resolution)
- hold public authorities and corporations accountable (“watch-dogs”)
- provide social networks for members, promote skills and knowledge concerning cooperation, and promote norms and values, such as trust and reciprocity.

NPA’s approach to the concept of Civil Society

People’s rights and people’s own initiatives and participation for development are fundamental to NPA's work. Liberation movements and people’s organisations promoting equal rights and opportunities for all are important arenas for NPA. These movements and organisations normally attempt to bring about changes in state structures and policies.

NPA shares the vision that civil society organisations and the state have different roles and contributions to a build a society that secures peoples' rights. The state should provide opportunities and ensure conditions for people’s participation, and in a democracy civil society organisations should not be regarded as a substitute for the state. Civil society organisations alone cannot institute or ensure people’s rights. Hence in a democracy, civil society organisations should recognise the role of the state and interact with it. Ensuring people's rights in some instances implies cooperation, while in others it calls for confrontation by demanding, accountability and transparency, and challenging aspects of state legitimacy. A strategic focus for NPA is the achievement of a dynamic alliance for democratisation and development between the state and civil society organisations. However, in many societies such alliances hardly exist, and ongoing conflicts of interest between the state and sectors of civil society are common in most countries.

The state and civil society organisations are inter-dependent in any attempt at developing democracy. Although our focus of support and partnership is on civil society organisations, NPA will not pursue a state-minimalist approach that promotes the free-market and privatisation. On the contrary, we would rather explore ways of enhancing the competence and capacity of the state to respond to the needs of the population. NPA’s approach to civil society focuses on democratization and increased inclusion. When assessing initiatives of civil society organizations or government policies it is central to address the issue of whom they represent.

As a civil society organization and based on NPA’s objectives, the organisation’s international cooperation should encompass the following two principal working areas:

- a) *Influencing Norwegian authorities, the public and international organisations* in order to bring about change (see above-mentioned objectives) through advocacy, i.e. lobbying, networking, public awareness work, and
- b) *International cooperation*: Supporting partner-organisations in their struggle for change (cf. above-mentioned objectives).