



**Forum Syd's  
Policy Platform  
2013-2022**

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**Our vision is a just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change.**

When people use and develop democracy, common resources are distributed more fairly and poverty is reduced. This happens around the world when people join forces to claim their rights and empower themselves to change their lives.

Therefore, Forum Syd works for people's organisation's and a strong civil society.

**Area of application:**

Forum Syd and the work of member organisations are guided by the vision and core values. Sub granting is regulated by agreements with respective donors.

**Decided by:** Forum Syd member meeting 24 of November 2012

**Period of validity:** Up to and including 2022. References to other documents (see footnotes) are updated continuously.

**Producer responsible under Swedish law:** The Forum Syd board

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## Forum Syd - organisations collaborating for a just and sustainable world

Forum Syd is a Swedish non-profit organisation. Our members are Swedish civil society organisations working towards a just and sustainable world. Forum Syd's operations complement and strengthen our members' own work and are governed by the organisation's statutes, this policy platform and the multi-year operation plans, which are adopted by the Annual Meeting.

### Objectives

Forum Syd's objectives are to:

Strengthen marginalised<sup>1</sup> people around the world who organise to claim their rights

Advocate for changes<sup>2</sup> that contributes to a just and sustainable world.

### Roles

Forum Syd has four mutually dependent roles that interact to give the organisation comprehensive, competence, legitimacy and a financial base:

**Advocate.** We advocate for changes that contribute to a just and sustainable world.

**Capacity developer.** We strengthen development actors in Sweden and abroad.

**Development actor.** We run development programmes in partnership with organisations in partner countries.

**Grant administrator.** We distribute and quality assures grants to Swedish organisations working with international development cooperation and with Swedish information campaigns on global issues.

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<sup>1</sup> The form marginalisation takes depends on where in the world the individual lives. Generally speaking, people can be said to be marginalised when they are denied influence over important social functions affecting their cultural, social and economic lives. It can also entail the deprivation of rights, such as those to health, education or housing.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of advocate is broad, and ranges from forming opinion through contacts and meetings with individual decision-makers to running general public information campaigns. Forum Syd deems it especially important to *spread knowledge* about global issues and development cooperation to different target groups in Sweden in order to *stimulate their engagement* in and efforts to help bring about global justice and sustainable development.

## Forum Syd and member organisations

Forum Syd shall be a meeting point and arena for member organisations to exchange experiences and improve working methods. Forum Syd shall also be a platform for advocacy

## Forum Syd's stakeholders

**For stakeholders in our partner countries, Forum Syd shall** offer long-term collaboration and capacity building. As part of the collaboration Forum Syd influences power-holders in Sweden, EU and the rest of the world.

**For civil society organisations in Sweden and other countries in which we operate, Forum Syd shall** provide a forum for experience-sharing, administrate grants and contribute to capacity building.

**For donors and assigning clients, Forum Syd shall** be a legitimate civil society actor in development cooperation that contributes to lasting change and democracy.

**For the Swedish public and decision-makers<sup>3</sup>, Forum Syd shall** be a source of information and inspiration regarding global development issues and civil society development cooperation.

## Forum Syd's vision

A just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change.

## Forum Syd's values take our vision to a deeper level

### **A just and sustainable world...**

Forum Syd believes that poverty has structural causes related to power imbalances, both internally within a country and globally. Poverty is not just about the lack of financial resources; it is also about being denied rights, being discriminated against and not being able to influence one's life. Striving to ensure that all people have their political, social, economic and cultural rights recognised and respected is thus a cornerstone of our poverty-reduction efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> By this is meant decision-makers who pursue Swedish policies in national, regional and international bodies.

To Forum Syd, poverty reduction is not only and primarily a matter of growth but of distribution of resources. Poverty will never be eradicated unless the world's resources are more fairly distributed between countries, communities and people. Global justice is about the distribution of resources and welfare so that the world's most deprived people can improve their life conditions and life situations. For this to happen, the privilege and power structures responsible for unjust distribution must be challenged and reformed. For instance, the global regulations governing trade, investments and the flow of capital must be so formulated as not to jeopardise the ability of countries to carry out their policies for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The fairer redistribution of power and resources is futile if we do not also ensure the sustainable use of the planet's ecosystems.

Forum Syd interprets sustainable development as having the following dimensions:

*Social sustainability*, which includes recognised and respected rights and people having the power of influence over the decisions that affect them.

*Economic sustainability*, which includes global economic justice and people's ability to earn a living.

*Ecological sustainability*<sup>4</sup>, which includes the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems. People's rights to clean energy, food, water, natural resources, sustainable living and housing, education and health must be recognised and respected without resource extraction exceeding the planet's supply capacity, and without jeopardising ecosystem services for present and future generations.

### **...in which all people have the power to effect change**

Functioning democratic institutions, free, regular elections and a free media are the essential conditions of a democracy, but if we are to realise our vision of empowering all people to effect change, more is needed. Factors such as education, gender awareness, health, safety and opportunities for subsistence also affect people's access to influence. Forum Syd strives to bring about greater democracy<sup>5</sup>, whereby all people have genuine opportunities to be involved in the decisions that *affect* their lives. We focus on active popular participation, respect for human rights and combating discrimination.

Forum Syd sees democracy as a process that must be kept vibrant and continually developed at different levels of society. We believe that democracy results in less

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<sup>4</sup> Forum Syd's views on sustainable development are developed in *Forum Syd's Official Position Statement of the Environment and Climate*

<sup>5</sup> Forum Syd's views on democracy are developed in *Realise Democracy and Create Justice*

poverty. When more people can claim their rights and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, we believe that decisions thus taken will benefit more people and lead to a more just distribution of resources.

Forum Syd works for an equal society<sup>6</sup> in which all people can make free choices and have their rights recognised and respected regardless of their gender identity. We live in a world where women as a group are subordinated to men as a group, and this has far-reaching consequences for women's and men's roles, resources and opportunities. Forum Syd believes that biological sex is one of the main reasons for power imbalances between people. Gender-based power structures are found in all societies and at all levels, and are therefore a key issue to address in the creation of a just world.

### **A pluralistic civil society<sup>7</sup> creates opportunities for people to effect change**

Forum Syd is part of the global civil society<sup>8</sup> and we are convinced that the growth of new social movements, in the broadest sense, has an essential part to play in the global changes that must take place if development is to progress in the direction of our vision. Civil society is a broad, complex arena of groups of differing ambitions, sizes and interests. The pluralism of civil society has a value in and of itself in that it gives a wide range of groups a voice and the power to affect the political agenda.

Civil Society empowers people to change their lives and communities at a local, regional, national and global level. Its actors can monitor power-holders and serve as a channel for popular participation in the public debate. In order to play this role, civil society organisations must embody democratic values and be democratically legitimate and representative.

**Strong partnerships build democracy globally.** Swedish organisations have a long tradition of networking with civil society groups worldwide, and it was out of this social movement collaboration that Sweden's development cooperation grew. Today, many development players understand the importance of strengthening civil society in order to reduce poverty and increase democracy. Still, Swedish organisations are highly

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<sup>6</sup> Forum Syd's views on gender are developed in *Doing Gender a Question of Power*

<sup>7</sup> Forum Syd's definition of civil society is as a collection of groups in which people cooperate for non-profit-making objectives alongside public authorities, families, political parties, private companies and market players. Civil society is organised at a local, regional and global level and comprises social movement organisations, networks, foundations, institutes, loosely organised groups, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Forum Syd's views on civil society are developed in *Policy för det civila samhällets roll i en demokratisk utveckling* (Policy for the role of civil society in democratic development)

instrumental in ensuring that development cooperation is *collaborative*. Organisations share values and can meet each other as equal partners despite coming from different circumstances. Civil society collaborations are much more than merely sharing development projects. They are about exchanging ideas and experiences, and possessing a common urge to shape policies in the interests of a more just and sustainable world. Swedish organisations can give space to the voices of organised people in their partner countries, who often find it more difficult to have their opinions heard in international contexts.

**Organisations enrich the Swedish debate on the drivers of change.** The Swedish organisations that are engaged in development cooperation and global issues represent a wide range of ideas and policies, all of which contribute to a multi-faceted discussion in Sweden on the forces that drive development. The organisations enable people to learn more, become involved and work actively for a sustainable and just world. Sweden's ability to pursue an effective policy for global development increases with the support of knowledgeable and engaged citizens.

## How Forum Syd puts its values into practice

### We work for lasting change

We believe that a thorough analysis of the context, the problems to be rectified and the conditions within which they exist, must form the basis of strategic change processes.

**Those affected must participate in the analyses.** One important principle is that the people affected by a development project must be the ones who formulate both the problems and the solutions. This means that our development cooperation must be based on analyses carried out locally with the influence and direct participation of the relevant groups and individuals; it also means that these groups and individuals must be involved in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the resulting projects. In every project, we safeguard the capacity of women to work actively and represent their own interests. Forum Syd considers the bottom-up perspective an important question of justice and a way of strengthening the sustainability of the changes achieved.

**A holistic approach to development.** Analyses of the context and its problems and opportunities must also take into account factors of particular significance to the particular aspect of development, such as the presence of conflicts and violence<sup>9</sup>, environmental and climate threats<sup>10</sup>, alcohol and drug problems, as well as HIV/AIDS<sup>11</sup> and the local health situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Forum Syd's views on conflict are developed in *Build democracy in the midst of the conflict*

<sup>10</sup> Forum Syd's views on the environment are developed in *Make the environment a human right*

<sup>11</sup> Forum Syd's views on HIV and AIDS are developed in *Make HIV and AIDS an issue of rights*

**We fight discrimination.** Our work involves fighting discrimination in all its forms and challenging unjust power structures. We must be aware and take account of the co-existence and mutual influence of different power structures. Marginalisation and poverty manifest themselves differently in the various groups and individuals operating in the same context. This applies, for example, to discrimination on grounds of sex, class, ethnicity, disability, age<sup>12</sup>, sexual orientation and HIV status<sup>13</sup>. All development projects must take this into consideration to ensure that they do not reinforce unjust power relations.

### **We challenge unjust structures**

We influence Swedish policy on different levels in the interests of global justice and a sustainable world. We inform Swedish society about the forces driving development and the need for policy reforms, stronger global commitment, and lifestyle changes in order to achieve a fairer distribution of the world's resources. We work with other global networks and organisations towards democratisation and greater institutional transparency.

### **We take a rights-based approach (RBA) to our work**

A rights-based approach means challenging the discriminatory norms and power structures that prevent people from exercising influence over social development and deciding over their own lives. Rights-based work helps to bring about lasting structural changes to society. Forum Syd focuses on the responsibilities of governments to guarantee the human rights of their citizens. A rights-based approach means working actively with respect to non-discrimination, active popular participation and a rights focus<sup>14</sup>.

**Non-discrimination.** We consider it imperative to combat discrimination, challenge unjust power structures and empower people living in poverty to take part in the decisions that affect them. We can work towards non-discrimination by influencing attitudes, behaviours, customs and traditions within organisations or at a local or national level.

**Active popular participation.** We strengthen marginalised people's ability to organise in order to demand their rights, create more opportunities for popular participation and formulate political proposals. People uniting to change their situation help to establish a deeper level of democracy.

**A rights focus.** Forum Syd deems it important to influence and monitor political structures, laws, decisions and implementations to ensure that power-holders act upon

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<sup>12</sup> Forum Syd's views on youth influence are developed in *Reduce poverty by the influence of youth*

<sup>13</sup> Forum Syd's views on HIV and AIDS are developed in *Make HIV and AIDS an issue of rights*

<sup>14</sup> UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the foundation of Forum Syd's rights-based work.

their responsibilities to recognise and respect human rights. We also help to inform people about their rights and increase their capacity to claim them.

### **We build civil society capacity**

Forum Syd believes that civil society organisations have an essential part to play in the creation of a just and sustainable world, and we therefore work to strengthen their capacity. We consider it particularly important to promote the ability of marginalised groups to organise and to strengthen democratic forces within civil society. Three functions that we consider especially important as regards civil society's contributions to the democratisation and development processes are

- Influencing and monitoring national governments to ensure that they recognise and respect the human rights of their citizens.
- Supporting popular organisation and creating opportunities for people to participate (e.g. to raise relevant issues onto the political agenda).
- Providing an arena where people can develop their skills as regards democratic decision-making and demanding accountability.

Collaboration between civil society actors makes them more effective and creates a broader base. Forum Syd therefore supports the cooperative efforts of different parts of civil society at a local, national and international level.

**We develop partnerships<sup>15</sup> with actors in our partner countries.** We develop partnerships with actors in developing countries and Eastern Europe. Forum Syd seeks to develop as equal partnerships as possible. Partnership is characterised by mutual accountability and shared values and interests. Being a partner rather than a financier is central to Forum Syd as an organisation and we are convinced that partnerships that create space for dialogue and mutual learning help us to realise our vision.

**We work for more effective development cooperation.** We abide by the eight Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness<sup>16</sup>. These principles concern how civil society should conduct itself in order to be an effective development actor, and were drawn up by a global assembly of civil society organisations. Swedish civil

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<sup>15</sup> Forum Syd's concept of partnership is developed in *Forum Syds policy för det civila samhällets roll i en demokratisk utveckling* (Forum Syd's policy for civil society's role in a democratic development) decided by the Board January 2013.

<sup>16</sup> The eight Istanbul Principles are: 1. Respect and promote human rights and social justice; 2. Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women's and girls' rights; 3. Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation; 4. Promote environmental sustainability; 5. Practise transparency and accountability; 6. Pursue equitable partnership and solidarity; 7. Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning; 8. Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

society organisations, in their capacity as donors, have also pledged to do their utmost to:

Adapt their development cooperation activities to the strategies and administrative systems of the recipient organisations

Provide long-term and flexible support

Be transparent and protect mutual accountability.

## **About this Policy Platform document**

Forum Syd's Policy Platform 2013-2022 is a visionary guiding document developed jointly by the Board and the Member Organisations. The Policy Platform reflects the core values of Forum Syd and its Member Organisations. The first section describes the vision, values, purpose, roles and interests of Forum Syd and the second section describes how Forum Syd shall translate this vision and the values into practice.

