



Norwegian People's Aid

# PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRATISATION

– Mobilising people for democracy and a just distribution of resources

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**INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY**  
2016-2019





Photo: Charles Lomodong

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Copyright 2016 by Norwegian People's Aid  
Cover photo: Ruins in Gaza after Israel's bombing in 2014.  
Photo: Norwegian People's Aid  
Design: Oktan Oslo

# NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID AND OUR VISION

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is a politically independent membership-based organisation working in Norway and in more than 30 countries around the world. Founded in 1939 as the labour movement's humanitarian solidarity organisation, NPA aims to improve people's living conditions and to create societies that are more just and more democratic.

NPA's international work is guided by the decisions made by the 19th congress 2015. True to our vision to show "Solidarity in Practice", we partner with organisations dedicated to defending the rights and interests of marginalised groups. We believe that broad popular mobilisation and collective organising is essential to ensuring lasting change. We work with organisations rooted in their social, cultural and political context, which are best placed to mobilise people for a just distribution and claim rights vis-à-vis political and business elites and the state.



2015: First democratic election in Myanmar in decades. NPA's partner organisations participated as election observers. Photo: Julie Strand Offerdal

## ***NPA's international work covers three core areas:***

1. Democratisation and just distribution of power and resources.
2. Humanitarian action and crisis response.
3. Humanitarian disarmament.

This strategy fleshes out our approach and objectives in pursuing the first of these three areas, "Democratisation and fair distribution of power and resources", while also incorporating key elements regarding Humanitarian action and crisis response.



Photo: Henrik Stabell

Fahmi Shawwa's citrus farm was demolished by the Israeli army in 2008. NPA's partners in Gaza rehabilitates damaged land and Fahmi was able to start using his land again in 2014.  
Photo: Khalil Zaquot



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## THE CHALLENGES WE SEEK TO ADDRESS

Poverty is not primarily a matter of lack of resources, but rather a matter of how resources are controlled and distributed. NPA sees economic inequality and democracy as highly interlinked. Large economic inequalities lead to unequal distribution of power that undermines democratic processes. Lack of democratic structures creates political elites who use political power for economic enrichment. This is why we support economically and politically marginalised people to find ways to assert power and influence. We will give special attention to the following challenges in our programme and advocacy work:

### *A. Disenfranchised democracy*

Although most of the world's population has gained the right to vote, few citizens, especially women, are able to have a real say in decisions that affect their lives. Even in well-established democracies, decision-making is increasingly skewed towards the interests of the elites and the markets: money speaks louder than votes, and political parties are losing influence. Global governance institutions have also shown to be dominated by narrow state interests, and to be more open to the private sector than to civil society. Important international negotiation processes, such as trade agreements and peace processes are conducted far away from the majority of those

affected. The lack of faith in democracy in parts of the world has meant a turn towards other, more extreme, ideologies.

Because civil society poses difficult questions to political and economic elites, it faces pushback and restrictions. Authoritarian and repressive states are increasingly rolling back long-established human rights standards and silencing critical voices amongst opposition parties, civic activists and the media. Hostility towards civil society is becoming normalised.

### *B. Economic inequality*

We are witnessing an alarming rise in inequality both within countries and between the richest and the poorest in the world. The larger part of global wealth is concentrated among a few rich men. Billions are kept in poverty as the majority of the population does not benefit from economic growth.

There is growing agreement that today's disparities and their worsening trajectory are dangerous. Unequal societies are more likely to be corrupted, to exploit and abuse workers, and to weaken the safety net. Even the richest and most powerful political and corporate elites gathering at the World Economic Forum in Davos have pointed to inequality as the most pressing problem of the coming decade. Reducing inequality

within and among countries has moved right up the global agenda through the adoption by the United Nations of a dedicated Goal on Inequality (Goal 10), as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Even as inequality rises on the political agenda we see no shift towards redistributive policies. Distribution of resources is a result of distribution of power. Elites have few incentives to change the status quo unless pressured to do so by a broad mobilisation of actors and organised groups.

### *C. Urbanisation*

An increasing part of the world's population is living in urban areas. Next to areas of wealth, many people live in slums, working in the informal sector or without access to employment, relevant education or necessities such as good housing, health facilities and clean water.

In many slums and other poor urban areas, large number of people, prevailing social problems and lack of basic services creates a fertile ground for organising, both in traditional organisations and more informal networks. Better organised urban poor have the potential to improve their communities, and to politically challenge inequality and lack of basic services.

Many of the challenges affecting poor, urbanised populations hit young people especially hard. Overall, young people today are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. By 2030, individuals under 18 years old are expected to make up 60 percent of urban populations. Without peaceful avenues for political expression and civic engagement, young people's frustration can lead to apathy, social unrest, violent protests or even extremist behaviour.



NPA's partners in South Africa support income generating activities in the slums.  
Photo: Håvard Sæbø

### *D. Land and natural resource management*

The quest for control over natural resources, and increasing effect of climate change, has resulted in pressure on farm-able land and increase in extractive activities. Small-scale and subsistence agricultural labourers face increasing competition from powerful business interests for control over their land and resources. Affected communities, who potentially have their livelihood and community taken away, are often excluded from decisions affecting the land they rely on.

Extractive, and other industries that affect local communities, need to become more transparent, and held environmentally and socially responsible. This means democratic control, ensuring fair sharing of revenues with local communities and equitable contributions of royalties and taxes to national governments.



NPA's partners in Myanmar teach activists in human rights.  
Photo: Kristine Lindberg

More than ever before, rural populations depend on collective action to challenge the powerful. Similarly, indigenous people's organisations are striving to defend their rights to control their land and other natural resources, including their right to free, prior and informed consent when affected by agribusiness and extractive industries. Companies are responsible for adverse human rights effects of their activities.

### *E. Humanitarian crisis and resilience*

With the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters and the growing number of protracted conflicts leading to large-scale displacements, the gap is widening between people's needs for humanitarian assistance and protection,

and the ability of national governments and international actors to meet these needs. Humanitarian action is increasingly dangerous as humanitarian law is less respected by warring parties.

Given their presence in communities and the strong legitimacy they enjoy, local organisations are well positioned to carry out humanitarian work. More effective crisis response will hinge on ensuring that all parts of society are involved, not only in the response, but also in preparedness and risk mitigation. In spite of this a relatively small part of international humanitarian funding reaches local organisations.

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## OUR LONG-TERM GOALS AND APPROACH

### *Our goals*

NPA has a political approach to development. At the core of our approach is a focus on supporting people denied access to power. When weak democratic structures enable elites to put their own interests over general public concerns, we strive to strengthen the power of people's organisations and movements.

NPAs overall goals for our long-term development and democracy work is **democratisation** and **just distribution**.

### *A. Democratisation*

We work with organisations demanding that government decision-makers and other power-holders be more democratic and respect the political space of civil society, be more responsive to public needs and more accountable for their actions. We envision organisations with capacity to engage in collective action, to defend the interests of their members, increase women's influence and participation and advocate for an equitable society. For this purpose, we support the

strengthening of their capacity to organise, build alliances

and engage power-holders from the bottom to the top, through both formal and informal mechanisms.

### *B. Just distribution of resources*

We work with organisations demanding a more equitable distribution of assets and resources – be they natural, economic, or informational. We envision organisations that challenge the concentration of power that perpetuates exclusion and poverty and promote policies to reduce economic inequality. In order to achieve this goal, we support the organisations in developing their own agenda in each context. We pay particular attention to the participation and influence of women because deep-rooted inequalities often have a gendered bias.

We organise our efforts around a focused set of outcomes. These outcomes will support our partners' needs and priorities, and capture the development changes that NPA will contribute towards in cooperation with our partners during the course of this strategic plan.



***Our outcomes are:***

1. Partners organise people
2. Internal democratic structures and practices enhanced in partner organisations
3. Increased influence of partner organisations in policy- and decision making at local and national levels
4. Humanitarian action is provided by NPA and its partners in crisis settings.
5. Increased influence of NPA and its partners in Norwegian and international decision making and policy making

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## HOW WE WORK

NPA's main methods in supporting popular organising in order to influence democratisation and just distribution of resources are:

- To support partner organisations to mobilise for social and political change
- To build alliances with likeminded organisations and develop our political advocacy work in Norway and internationally
- To strengthen our support to partners to build resilience and meet humanitarian needs

We also recognise that it is necessary to address informal and semi-formal structures of power, like discrimination based on gender or ethnicity, at all levels in society.

The core of our programme work is based on a context analysis describing actors, power relations, gender structures, distribution of resources and humanitarian vulnerability. The context analysis will explain the rationale for choice of part-

ners we engage with, the alliances we make and how different actors complement each other. These analyses will be updated regularly to ensure that our engagement is still relevant.

The context analysis will describe the present distribution of power between actors, their respective sources of power and particular challenges for women and barriers to women's participation. It will identify the processes and actors that can bring about opportunities for redistribution of power and resources, as well as the structures and actors that are likely to oppose change. The context analysis also includes an analysis of the risk for, and dynamics of, violent conflict, as well as other crises or catastrophes and the response strategy and capacity of local authorities, institutions and organisations. Additionally, NPA is conscious about our own role; experience shows that large financial flows tends to effect civil society organising, making autonomous organising more difficult. NPA will also be conscious to never act in a way that jeopardises our partners' security.

NPA will, within the broad frame of democratisation and just distribution of resources, support partners with common



Public meeting in Bolivia in 2009 regarding the referendum on the new constitution.  
Photo: Øystein Sassebo Bryhni

values based on their own agenda. The issues dealt with by partners will depend on what mobilises and engages in each country.

### *Supporting organisations to mobilise for social and political change*

NPA's main method of work is to support collective organising and mobilisation strategies. This approach offers several advantages over more conventional ways to support democracy-building and social accountability. First, it is a strategy used by and accessible to marginalised groups. More formal mechanisms for citizen engagement, such as legal processes or formal complaint mechanism, are not always easily accessible. Second, it does not rely on individual 'champions' or goodwill among elected officials or civil servants, who can easily be manipulated or co-opted. Professional NGOs often have less accountability to citizens and their priorities. Broad-based legitimacy and support is vital for pursuing change agendas over the longer-term.

NPA applies a systematic approach to organisational development of partners. Depending on the specific needs of each organisation, and the political context within which it operates, we support the organisations in developing political and organisational capacities.

NPA supports organisations in their work to broaden their grassroots' base, including recruitment of members. Organisations are also supported to enhance their own structures and internal mechanisms for democratic decision-making, including their commitment to mainstream gender equality across their organisational culture. NPA supports partners in development of political platforms and priorities, as well as technical capacities including finance, transparency and prevention of corruption.

NPA support partners to develop strategic capacity in various national and international arenas. This includes partners' efforts to raise issues, to build support for their proposals, and to implement advocacy strategies. Communication and information work to reach both members and the broader public is also emphasised as media in many countries is controlled by and promotes the interests of small economic or political elites. NPA also strengthens the capacity of organisations to forge alliances based on shared agendas, and to engage in collective mobilisation strategies.

For NPA, local ownership of change processes is key. Our support is geared towards the pursuit of change agendas defined by partner organisations themselves, based on local priorities in their specific context. Likewise, partners are fully

in the lead of designing and implementing organisational development programmes supported by NPA.

### *Building alliances and advocating nationally and in Norway*

NPA itself also engages in advocacy towards the Norwegian public and decision-makers and in global advocacy efforts with other international partners. NPA communicates messages from our partners and their constituencies to relevant decision-makers, such as the Norwegian Bank Investment Management (NBIM) which manages the Norwegian Pension Fund. We are well grounded in our Norwegian constituencies and this gives us legitimacy when challenging authorities and the public in Norway on issues of foreign policy and international development. We also engage with the Norwegian private sector to amplify the voices of those who are negatively impacted by their activities. NPA works closely with the Norwegian labour movement to carry out advocacy efforts on selected international issues.

NPA will engage in political processes and debates focusing on:

- Norwegian foreign policy and cooperation, especially towards countries where NPA has programmes.
- Development policies with respect to reduction of inequalities and strengthening of civil society organising.
- Norwegian investments and investment policies, with emphasis on cases where these affect the right to land, democratic control over natural resources or local communities' right to be heard and consulted.

### *Responding to crisis and building resilience*

As a solidarity organisation NPA responds to crisis and support organisations and communities to become more

resilient towards the crisis. NPA has long-term presence and experience from countries in war, conflict or other humanitarian crisis. This combined with a well-rooted partnership approach and long-term perspective, shall be NPA's basis for an increased and improved response in humanitarian crisis.

NPA responds to crises mainly in countries where we already have programmes and committed local partners to work with. Exceptionally, NPA will deliver emergency relief on its own or with other organisations when it does not have local partners on the ground. Wherever possible, we strive to link our crisis response work to ongoing development activities, and to utilise NPA experiences in Preparedness and Rescue Service and Humanitarian Disarmament. Humanitarian action can in special cases also serve as a bridge towards a more long-term development programme.



Cambodia small scale farmers organize themselves to stand united against land grabbers. Photo: Werner Anderson

In humanitarian crisis, local organisations and communities are the first responders and it is vital that they own and lead disaster response efforts. NPA therefore works closely with local partners in humanitarian action. Depending on needs on the ground, we will remain flexible in our response and develop global support expertise on food security, livelihoods and protection in crisis settings. We shall ensure that our partners' response fully recognises and addresses the different impact of conflict and disasters on men and women, and their differing needs, including the protection of women and girls against gender-based violence in humanitarian responses.

NPA will support people guarding against future crises by incorporating disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness in our programmes. We also build the capacity of local organisations, to address root causes of conflict and to mediate disputes.

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## WHO WE WORK WITH

The choice of actors to engage with is a crucial programme decision, both in long-term democratisation work and in humanitarian action. NPA will engage with partners that share our broad goal of democratisation and just distribution of resources, based on the role the organisation play in social and political processes as identified in the context analysis.

NPA's priority is to engage with people's organisations; those that actually organise people or represent a group of people based on common interests or goals, rooted in the local social and political context – farmers associations, organisations of indigenous peoples, women's organisations, slum-dwellers or informal sector associations, issue-based movements, etc. These organisations, based on membership or other forms of active involvement within the organisation. NPA strives to increase the number people's organisations we partner with.

NPA will also work with NGOs who support people's organisations or NGOs that play a complementary advocacy role on key issues. NGOs can as an ally contribute to the leverage and expand political space.

In humanitarian action, the same engagement criteria apply, and we favour partnerships with organisations with the ability to engage with the communities to prepare for disaster, manage during crises and recover from the crisis.

NPA work with organisations who believe that gender should not determine a person's welfare or influence over domestic, social and political affairs and support women's active involvement.



Photo: Ken Opprann  
People are protesting outside the Phnom  
Penh court house against corrupt politicians.

# INTERNAL ORGANISATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR NPA

To adjust to the challenges and opportunities outlined in this strategy, NPA will continue to strengthen its core competencies as follows:

## *A. Building true partnerships*

NPA's main strength in development cooperation is our partnership approach, and NPA will continue to develop our partnership methodology, ensuring that we are a leading actor in this field. This entails that partners consider NPA to be engaged in true partnerships based on their priorities, and that we have the capacity and ability to assist developing their organisations. To ensure that we are able to fulfil this role, it is necessary to balance the number of partners in a given programme with the available resources to support them.

## *B. A political approach*

NPA's political approach to development is one of our main strengths. It requires the ability to analyse obstacles and opportunities for democratisation and redistribution, political and economic power structures and the actors in civil society.

A thorough context analysis also provides us with tools to adjust and adapt programmes according to changing contexts. It is useful when thinking about the feasibility of policy reform and institutional change, the contribution that NPA and our partners can realistically make, and the risks involved. NPA will continue developing our method for analysing contexts and systematically document why we choose the approaches and actors we do.

## *C. Utilising links between NPA's work in Norway and abroad*

NPA is a membership-based organisation, which gives us credibility when working with other popular organisations. We will further strengthen the linkages between our development work abroad and our political work in Norway, our members and local groups and the Norwegian labour movement. This includes support to knowledge-sharing and lesson-learning between our partners in Norway and abroad, drawing on relevant expertise from for example NPA Preparedness and Rescue Services in Norway in our humanitarian work, technical expertise, but also experience in mobilising and organising volunteers. We will work to ensure

that the NPA members and local branches have easy access to information about our programme work to encourage international solidarity among our members and the public.

#### *D. Focus on results*

NPA has in recent years focused on improving our results and monitoring work. We will ensure that programme phases, processes and experiences are documented and made available to all NPA programmes –thus ensuring that we have a solid evidence-based foundation for decision-making, and that we continue to have so throughout the implementation of this strategy.

NPA use a Results Framework, to monitor and manage progress and report publicly on the implementation of this strategy. It sets out the development outcomes which NPA is seeking to contribute, and metrics to measure the actual results we will deliver, for which we can be held accountable.

#### *E. Fostering learning amongst partners and staff*

Done well, monitoring and evaluation can serve multiple stakeholders – from partners and citizens in the countries we work in, to NPA staff. However collecting data is just the first step in a much broader process of dissemination and discussion. NPA is committed to creating a ‘learning culture’ which values knowledge, encourages critical debate and accepts the reality that not all programmes will be successful or should be sustained. To this end we will ensure that emerging findings and lessons learned from our work are widely disseminated across the organisation, notably through training programmes for staff and partner organisations. To be able to share knowledge and knowhow on our strategic issues, NPA will build competence networks in our organisation as well as develop our links to milieus of professional expertise.



Photo: Henrik Stabell

#### *F. Administrative efficiency*

NPA will continue to improve financial control and administrative systems. Management and administration will follow the provisions of our Quality Management System and will improve our planning systems for both administration and programme development. NPA will secure stability for our work and our partners by strictly adhering to donor requirements show our added value and diversify our donor base. NPA will have zero tolerance for corruption and sexual harassment. We expect adherence to NPA’s ethical guidelines and promote transparency, due diligence and professional management.



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