



NPA Policy:

Organisation and participation

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The NPAs International strategy 2008-2011 emphasises the strengthening of people's organisation and participation in order to promote changes in the unjust distribution of power and resources, between groups and between men and women. NPA recognises that structural inequalities like class belonging, sex, ethnicity or age often defines who sets the agenda, who's interests are taken into account and who's rights are respected. This also influences who defines the dominant models for development.

NPA's opinion is that real democratisation entails more than the establishment of democratic institutions. These become empty structures if they are not accompanied by an open public debate and an active organised society. The right and ability of people to organise and assert their interests on the public arena can promote democracy and counter unjust distribution of power. Overall NPA promotes the right and possibility to organise, participation of both women and men, the establishment of participatory mechanisms at all levels, openness, access to information and public debate.

Role of NPA

– local partnerships and global agendas

NPA supports organised participation in a variety of social and political contexts around the world. Our role is to support those struggling to have their voice heard and their interests put on the public agenda. In many instances local struggles are part of or relate to struggles for global justice. Examples are the lack of implementation of ILO convention 169 on indigenous people's rights to consultation, or struggles over natural resources and land investment/foreign direct investment.

- Through partnerships NPA seeks to focus common concerns raised from the south on the Norwegian and international development agenda.
- NPA advocacy efforts in Norway and globally are based on experiences from our programme work and consultations with partners.

Focusing on the actors

NPA focuses on the actors rather than on a set of predefined thematic issues. NPA needs to be flexible in order to engage with the issues that concerns and mobilise people. We build partnership in line with NPA's partnership policy, seeking actors that are rooted in the local context.

Organisational expressions will differ according to the social, cultural and political processes in each context. Civil society organisations are by nature diverse in terms of who they represent, as well as the interests and opinions they represent. They range from those representing privileged to marginalised groups in society, those defending status quo to those challenging the existing order, from left to right. The expression "civil society organisation" can contribute to blur the different nature of the organisations.

- For NPA it is crucial to have a good understanding of who the actors are and what role they play in society.
- NPA will base its support on a power analysis within civil society, between men and women, and a thorough analysis of who and what the different organisations represent in order to choose the right partners.
- For NPA it is crucial to have a good understanding of the processes that create inequality, the rifts in society and the issues that mobilise people.

The actors also differ in the way they are organised. The organisations range from professional NGOs, to social movements, flexible networks or traditional structures. Organisations that represent the interests of their social base have historically shown to be able to change their circumstances. People's organisations / representative social movements have in many instances shown the capacity to promote major changes in society. Historically this has been liberation movements, labour movements, women's movements, farmers and indigenous people's movements. Organisations based on a common ideal or agenda have shown capacity to influence political decisions and public opinions, especially if combined with an active membership base.

- NPA sees the historical learning from people's organisations and give priority to support representative organisations that organise marginalised people on the basis of common interest, and to membership organisations based on a common ideal or agendas. Professional NGOs may provide important support to change processes, often when in alliance with social movements.

NPA sees it as important to assess whether or not such organisations have a distinct connection to its society and if they have an agenda of their own. Organisations driven by donor agendas and primarily adapting to themes which can generate money are often generated in civil societies with a high influx of international aid. NPA does not wish to contribute to such processes, and believes that such organisations are not primarily the ones able to promote change towards a more just distribution of power and resources.

- NPA prioritises organisations that have an agenda of their own and actively seek to support partners on the agendas that engage and mobilise them.

Organisational forms and movements are changing. There is a tendency towards more flexible networks of organisations and individuals that ally for shorter periods of time to forward

specific issues, agendas for social change or respond to sudden changes in the political context. While in the long term perspective organisational strengthening is the main focus, NPA will also have the flexibility to respond to such short term mobilisation that may have a crucial political impact. New forms of communication and social media also influence the ways the organisations and social movements work.

- NPA will be flexible in its response to different forms of short term networks that respond to the political context or mobilise people in order to influence the government or state policies.
- NPA will be open to support new forms of communication and mobilisation tools enabling organisations and networks to efficiently promote their agendas.

Strengthening organised participation

NPA has a special focus on organised participation as a means to gain strength and as a vehicle to mobilise for more just societies. For NPA, the following aspects of organising have a special significance;

First, people that otherwise lack power can through organisation have a better possibility to mobilise to gain influence over policies, attitudes and practice, challenge unjust structures in society or influence public opinion. Organised participation in society can both be a means to promote the members own interests and a means to influence the overall goals and priorities regarding the kind of society one would like to see.

Second, participation in organisations may be a growth and learning process for those involved regarding how to cooperate, set common goals, speak in public, elect and be elected or how to comply with different functions within the organisation. Organisations may be a school in democratisation and this may strengthen social networks and ties.

A major emphasis in NPA's work is to accompany and support the organisational development of partner organisations. The main tool for this is our ongoing dialogue with partner organisations where contextual analysis takes place, challenges are identified and cooperation agreed. A central focus in the cooperation of NPA is the strengthening of organisational capacities to influence how the state operates as well as the local or national government's policies or practice. This requires strategic capacity, capacity to relate to and build alliances with others, as well as capacity to understand and adapt to changing circumstances.

- NPA sees the support to organisational development as a crucial and integrated part of all partnerships.
- NPA will support the strengthening of organisational capacities to influence the state, public opinion and mobilize for social change.

Common goals, internal coherence and strength is important. Many organisations do not practice democracy internally and power may be concentrated in a small group or persons within the organisation. Frequently, men's opinions dominate over those of women and women are less represented in the leadership. Both the strategy and management of resources internally may be matters of considerable infighting if the mechanisms for dealing with decisions, conflicts or transparency in financial transactions are not in place.

- In our partnerships with civil society organisations NPA works to support the development of sound internal structures, democratic participation and accountability to their members, community or constituency.
- NPA will favour women's participation and gender equality within partner organisations.
- NPA may support the development of management and financial tools and routines with partners in order to strengthen their ability to promote their agendas on a sound organisational base.

Organisations and contextual challenges

Another critical issue is the fragmentation of movements or infighting between organisations that can limit the possibility to gain influence. Local or national conflicts, different positions or competition for the same donor resources can inhibit organisations from cooperating. Where alliances are built on the organisations own agendas and interests, there are many examples that the ensuing combined strength has led to crucial influence.

One complex alliance is with political parties or movements and ultimately often the relation with state and government itself. Key questions can be when or when not to engage with an authoritarian regime or a newly elected progressive one? When is being included in decision making being co-opted? When is it right to resist, confront, engage or seek political agreements? These questions face the organisations NPA partners with in all corners of the world. No easy answers can be given, and any analysis must be made in context. However, NPA views development for a more just distribution of resources as a political process. Consequently NPA would not in principle exclude working with organisations with links to parties and political movements.

- NPA encourages networking and alliances between organisations that have a common agenda as a means of gaining strength.
- NPA is available as a dialogue partner for the organizations we support as they address issues such as alliances and engagement with authorities.



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