



# CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP POLICY

---



**NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID**  
actalliance



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..... 4

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND SPACE ..... 7

NCA'S APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ..... 8

NCA'S PARTNERSHIP APPROACH ..... 10

PARTNERSHIP PORTFOLIO ..... 12

NCA'S ROLE AND ADDED VALUE IN PARTNERSHIPS ..... 16

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ..... 17

EXIT STRATEGIES AND PHASING OUT OF PARTNERSHIPS ..... 18

# INTRODUCTION

Civil Society is at the core of NCA's goals to save lives and seek justice. NCA believes that strong civil society actors and an enabling environment for civil society are prerequisites for the development of participatory democracy, accountable governance and social justice. Contributing to strong and independent civil society is therefore a goal in and of itself for NCA.

An enabling environment for civil society is a key factor in determining the extent to which freedoms of association, expression and assembly (including freedom of religion or belief), as well as other fundamental human rights are guaranteed. However, the space for civil society globally continues to shrink.

In 2019, CIVICUS found that 111 countries have “closed, repressed or obstructed” space for civil society.<sup>1</sup> More than one hundred governments have introduced laws restricting the legal space within which civil society can function, often using national security legislation to restrict free speech, the right to assembly, and the ability of foreign donors to support national CSOs.<sup>2</sup> A 2019 report, *Development Needs Civil Society – The Implications*

*of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals*, concluded that the effects of shrinking space are likely to halt or reverse progress towards the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and that intensive engagement with civil society is essential to reversing this trend.<sup>3</sup> NCA's path to the SDGs is therefore through civil society, where efforts to create an enabling environment for civil society are paired with **strong, equitable and sustainable partnerships**.<sup>4</sup>

NCA's main strategy to strengthen civil society (SCS) is to work in partnership with locally rooted faith and value-based organisations. Faith actors are key agents of change within the wider civil society space because of the strong role that religion plays in people's lives – shaping norms, policies and culture. NCA supports and challenges faith-based actors to play a constructive role in the broader civil society space – bridging faith concepts of human dignity and international standards for upholding human rights. Value-based actors who share NCA's vision and values are also strategically well-suited to contribute to change and may complement our faith-based partners.

---

1 CIVICUS, “State of Civil Society Report”, 2019, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2019>

2 Directorate-General for External Policies: European Parliament, “Shrinking Space for Civil Society: the EU Response”, 2017.

3 Act Alliance & Institute of Development Studies, “Development Needs Civil Society – The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals”, 2019.

4 Norad, “Norad's Support to Civil Society: Guiding Principles”, 2018.

5 NCA understands faith-based actors as groups, institutions and organisations that draw inspiration and guidance from their own religious tradition. Faith-based actors include congregations, religious leaders, faith-based humanitarian agencies or faith-based development organisations involved in social service delivery.

Indigenous women in Guatemala voting for local governance.  
Photo by: Jostein Hole Kobbeltvedt/Norwegian Church Aid





AMMAA MAMA KEENYA  
TIU MURAAJIO !!  
BIAS

FEDHI KOO MALEE  
DIRGIN HIN HEERUM

DIRGIN HIN HEERUM  
DHIK... W...

# CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND SPACE

NCA understands civil society as “the arena outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared values and interests”.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, this space is broad and includes a wide range of formal and informal actors, such as non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations and structures, peoples’ movements, community-based organisations, trade unions, cooperatives, environmental groups, professional associations, consumer organisations, human rights defenders, and the not for profit media. The mandates, goals, and methodologies of these different actors vary greatly, as do the ways in which they position themselves relative to the state, market and community.

Therefore, self-identification as ‘civil society’ amongst the organisations that NCA partners with is highly context specific. Some organisations may reject the civil society label in order to insulate themselves from government scrutiny or to distance themselves from the growing number of ill-intentioned civil society actors.

Faith actors in certain contexts may reject the civil society label to distinguish themselves from value-based ‘secular’ organisations. Regardless of how the context affects the precise language used to describe such actors, NCA’s partners play an important role in the wider civil society space – not only because of their social and political influence, but also because of their rootedness and presence in marginalised communities.

However, NCA does not conceptualise civil society just as a set of organisations, but also as a space or arena where people come together to discuss, associate or seek to influence society. By conceptualising civil society in this way, we are able to explore the actors and activities that exist in this space, and also think about how the space itself shapes society through laws and norms, power dynamics and shrinking space. Therefore, NCA approaches civil society both through partnerships with civil society organisations and through activities to foster an enabling environment for civil society.

---

<sup>6</sup> CIVICUS, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich, Volkhart, “Can We Measure Civil Society? A Proposed Methodology for International Comparative Research”, *Development in Practice* 17, no. 3 (2007): 338.



A group of young women and men in Ethiopia taking a stand against harmful practices relating to FGM.  
Photo by: Hilina Abebe/Norwegian Church Aid

# NCA'S APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

All of NCA's work aims to strengthen civil society and local capacities through a rights-based approach. Together with our partners, NCA empowers rights holders to participate in the transformation of their communities in solidarity with others, upholding human dignity and human rights. NCA contributes to enhancing partners' ability to participate in formal and informal civil society networks, strengthens their

organisational and financial capacities, and increases their advocacy capacity.

In order to give direction to, and measure our work to strengthen civil society, NCA has developed cross-cutting goals for SCS that are integrated into all of our programming and tailored to the context of each intervention.

## GLOBAL GOAL

Civil Society actors and space are strengthened to foster human rights and dignity and empower people to participate in the development and implementation of public policies, development plans and humanitarian responses.

### SUB-GOAL 1: RIGHTS-HOLDERS ARE ORGANISED AND EMPOWERED FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION ON COMMON INTERESTS

In order to exercise freedom of association and enhance human dignity, NCA supports the empowerment and organisation of rights-holders in community committees (for WASH, peace, women's rights, environmental protection, climate resilience, income generation, youth, etc.) and other groups that work together for common interests defined by the rights-holders themselves.

### SUB-GOAL 2: DUTY BEARERS ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE BY CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Building on the right to freedom of expression and assembly, NCA supports civil society actors in giving voice and agency to rights-holders who are deprived of the free exercise of their human rights. This may include engaging in dialogue with duty-bearers, legal actions, peaceful demonstrations, campaigns, budget monitoring and other non-violent means to influence policies, laws, norms and practices that are harmful for people and the environment. NCA will also address root causes of poverty and injustice with duty bearers in Norway and on the regional and global level, when possible, together with ACT Alliance. NCA supports faith actors to use their moral capital and wide outreach to contribute to improving the conditions for participatory democracy, accountable governance and social justice. This is of particular importance in contexts where civic space is being restricted and civil society actors are under pressure.



### **SUB-GOAL 3: UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS ARE EMPOWERED TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING**

As a way of stimulating participatory governance at all levels, NCA supports targeted empowerment and active inclusion in decision-making bodies for the groups and populations defined as marginalised in a given context. These may be indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, LGBTI or others. NCA promotes full participation in leadership for women and youth at all levels of decision making in political, economic, religious and public life.

### **SUB-GOAL 4: MULTI-ACTOR PLATFORMS ARE BUILT TO WORK TOGETHER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

NCA can play a role as convener or facilitator when there is a need for actors within and outside of civil society to come together across ideological, generational, faith-related or other dividing factors, to find common ground and work for transformative change for their constituencies. NCA is particularly well placed to link our faith-based partners with specialised NGOs and research institutions to complement their ability to reach and mobilise all segments of society, strengthening their competence and networks. NCA plays an active role in national ACT Forums to enhance coordination, relevance and impact.

NCA country programmes contribute to the SCS sub-goals that are relevant and possible to implement in their respective contexts. In instances where specific SCS sub-goals cannot be implemented due to issues of shrinking space, security or other reasons, country offices engage in dialogue with NCA's head office to provide information on the space and conditions for civil society in their context, as well as any possible mitigation measures to address these issues.

### **SUB-GOAL 5: LOCAL ACTORS AND NATIONAL NGOS INCREASE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

Working with and through local organisations and institutions enhances ownership, legitimacy and the sustainability of our humanitarian interventions. Where relevant, NCA will enhance or build the capacity of our long-term development partners for quality emergency preparedness and response. NCA will continue to work to ensure representation from civil society in relevant humanitarian coordination platforms, both nationally and globally. NCA is a signatory to the *Charter4Change* and is committed to the localisation of humanitarian responses.

### **SUB-GOAL 6: INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF PARTNERS ARE STRENGTHENED**

NCA has a systematic capacity development approach towards its core partners, in order to build strong and accountable civil society actors. Through jointly designed capacity development plans, and in coordination with other ACT agencies, NCA contributes to strengthening organisational capacities according to the gaps identified by NCA's Partnership Assessment Tool.

# NCA'S PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

NCA's vision, *Together for a Just World*, sets the agenda for our approach to partnership. NCA understands partnership as a **mutually empowering** relationship where both NCA and partners learn from and challenge one another to achieve our goals of saving lives and seeking justice. NCA seeks partners who are locally rooted and have strong degree of legitimacy in their local contexts. Our experience from working in long-term partnerships has shown that local ownership, trust and respect are key to building a sustainable and **vibrant civil society**.

NCA adapts its strategies for civil society partnerships to the local context, in line with the needs and realities identified through comprehensive context analyses,

humanitarian response strategies and our country programmes' theories of change. NCA strives for the active participation of marginalised groups, irrespective of their faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity. New strategies to support **active citizenship**<sup>8</sup> must be developed where civic space is being restricted, always keeping in mind the safety of our civil society partners and allies.

In order to respond to the overall vision of each country or regional strategy, NCA works with a strategic and balanced mix of actors, through different types of formal partnerships and other relationships. The following table illustrates NCA's partnership categories:

PARTNERSHIP CATEGORIES	GENERAL DEFINITION	EXAMPLES OF ACTORS
Core Partners	Faith-based	Organised expressions of any faith, religion or worldviews (e.g. indigenous).
	Value-based	Women's rights organisations, youth organisations, environmental organisations, etc.
Resource Partners	Specialized, professional organisations or institutions that can complement core partners' ability to reach and mobilise all segments of society and strengthen their competence and networks	Research institutions, academic institutions, NGOs or institutions specialized in a thematic area or methodology (e.g. budget monitoring, business development, market access), private sector actors
Strategic Networks and Alliances	Individuals, networks and social movements at national, regional and global levels, with whom NCA primarily has an issue-based, strategic, often non-funding relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The ACT Alliance</li> <li>· INGO Forums, associations, UN clusters, interest groups and networks</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> NCA defines active citizenship as people acting in solidarity with others, participating in the transformation of their communities and seeking just decisions from their leaders. NCA envisions communities where people are active participants in their own development and organise themselves to claim their rights.

### **NCA in the ACT Alliance**

Internationally and at the country level, NCA is an active participant in the ACT Alliance and in ACT Alliance Forums. ACT Forums are important arenas for strengthening civil society through the development of advocacy networks, joint actions and capacity development. NCA country offices are encouraged to actively participate

in their regional or national ACT Forums in fellowship with ACT sister agencies in order to increase the reach and impact of their work. NCA's policy, NCA in the ACT Alliance, gives further guidance for the ways in which NCA engages with ACT.



Faith and community leaders discuss reforestation and climate issues at the Menegesha Ethiopian Orthodox Church outside of Addis Ababa.  
Photo by: Hilina Abebe/Norwegian Church Aid

# PARTNERSHIP PORTFOLIO

In order to ensure a balanced and strategic partner portfolio, the following criteria for partner selection have been established:

- **Legitimacy and rootedness:** NCA works with partners who are viewed with legitimacy in their communities. These may be civil society organisations that are formed by rights holders themselves and thus represent them directly or civil society organisations that are formed to assist marginalised rights holders or represent their interests. NCA encourages partnership with organisations who represent diverse constituencies and have an inclusive membership base.
- **Rights-based approach:** To bring the concerns of rights holders to the attention of duty bearers, NCA identifies partners that can participate and advocate in relevant local, national and international fora. NCA prioritizes working with partners that use the rights-based approach and see their role as one that goes beyond alleviating acute needs. Partnerships with organisations that focus only on needs-based service delivery will be largely limited to fragile contexts and humanitarian crises or where service delivery is considered strategic and necessary for supporting the legal and political empowerment of the groups with whom NCA's partners work.
- **Faith-based and value-based organisations:** NCA prioritises partnering with faith-based actors and aims to include actors from various faiths in its partner portfolios. NCA also cooperates with value-based organisations in contexts where this is appropriate.
- **Quality and compliance:** NCA takes into consideration a partner's actual and/or potential capacity<sup>9</sup> to meet performance and compliance-related requirements such as:
  - Programme quality including planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation
  - Financial and administrative capacity
  - Technical proficiency in the programme area
  - Good governance
  - Ethical standards/Code of Conduct
  - Sustainability standards<sup>10</sup>
- **Country specific criteria:** Additional country-specific partner criteria and priorities may be developed and assessed, for instance partners with access to conflict-affected areas.
- **Size of partner portfolio and integrated programming:** NCA country offices regularly assess the number of partners in their partner portfolios from the perspective of value for money (cost efficiency) and their capacity for quality follow-

---

<sup>9</sup> Potential capacities refer to organisations that at present do not have the capacity to adhere to all of NCA's performance requirements, but according to references, have shown a willingness to change and improve to meet these requirements. On a case by case basis, NCA will partner with actors who may not meet all compliance criteria. NCA is diligent in identifying organisational/management/technical or other gaps that are addressed through capacity development.

<sup>10</sup> Sustainability Standards refer to the rights-based approach, gender sensitivity, conflict sensitivity, anti-corruption, environmental impact and accountability. Non-discrimination and inclusion of all marginalised populations is at the core of these standards.

up. The number of partners should not exceed 10–15 partners per country office. NCA encourages partners working in the same geographical areas to coordinate their efforts and, when possible, cooperate as part of NCA's integrated programming approach. NCA works to develop mechanisms to ease administrative follow up of several partners.

## OTHER PARTNERSHIP PORTFOLIO CONSIDERATIONS

### **Partner's links to the wider civil society:**

NCA encourages partners to join and strengthen informal and formal networks and groups with whom it is natural and strategic for the partners to cooperate. NCA encourages partners to prioritise strengthening existing organisational structures at the community level to avoid establishing parallel organisations. If no relevant organisational structure is available, it may be necessary to establish a new or supplementary structure.

### **Partner – government relations:**

Striking a balance between cooperation with, and constructive criticism of the government is essential. Partners are encouraged to cooperate with local authorities to ensure that projects are coordinated with existing government initiatives. In fragile states, NCA

and partners assess how they can be a bridge between civil society and the government through dialogue with authorities, by including government staff in trainings and by joint implementation of projects with authorities.<sup>11</sup> In countries where NCA supports service delivery, NCA encourages partners to link service delivery to advocacy and dialogue with the government in an effort to improve the government's commitments. In contexts with a more open civil society space, NCA and partners can engage in advocacy campaigns.

In all contexts, NCA and partners take into account the capacity of duty bearers to respond to right holders' claims. While in some contexts the main challenge might be a lack of will to respond to rights holders' claims, in other contexts the problem may be a lack of duty bearers' capacity and means to fulfil their mandate and responsibilities. In such cases, there is a risk of intensifying the perception that government/authorities are unresponsive, corrupt and marginalising certain parts of the population, which can fuel violent conflict. NCA therefore integrates a **conflict sensitive** approach into its context analyses and programming. NCA analyses not only duty bearer's motivation and will, but also their capacity to respond at different levels. If major gaps in duty bearer's capacity are identified, NCA will consider working directly with duty bearers to strengthen their capacity or coordinate with other actors who do so.

---

<sup>11</sup> Approximately 60% of the countries where NCA works are considered "fragile states" according to the OECD definition. CSOs have different roles in fragile states than in stable states, depending on how restrictive the civil society space is. In the absence of public services, CSOs are often important sources of basic services. World Bank, "Engaging Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Affected and Fragile States", 2005.

**Exploring innovative partnerships:**

In addition to traditional partnership models, NCA will explore new ways of working with informal networks and social movements. In cases where NCA's procedures and compliance requirements are obstacles to such partnerships, NCA aims to find responsible ways to accommodate them.

NCA will also explore ways to cooperate and partner with the private sector to increase the impact of our interventions by scaling up existing projects, accessing new markets, knowledge and innovative approaches, and through access to additional funding. However, NCA understands the risks that come with private sector partnership, such as undermining and/or jeopardising our independent role as a watchdog. Dialogue and potential partnership with companies in the extractive sector must be carefully considered and analysed together with NCA's partners.

**Enabling space for civil society:**

In many developing countries, civil society is under pressure from the government, opposition groups and the private sector. NCA and its partners will contribute to protecting and enhancing the space for civil society through dialogue and advocacy towards government,

by developing practices that demonstrate the value and relevance of faith-based actors in social change, and by supporting various initiatives, including but not limited to capacity strengthening, that allow civil society organisations to achieve their core missions. In several pilot countries, NCA will assist partners to navigate the effects of shrinking space while also assisting in advocacy aimed at the drivers and root causes of social conflict and shrinking space.

**Close accompaniment and direct implementation:**

In cases where a potential partner is innovative or strategically important but has weaker administrative or financial routines, an accompanied bilateral partnership may be considered. In such cases, NCA plays a more significant role in the financial or administrative follow up of partners, while working to strengthen their capacity.

NCA may be operational in humanitarian responses, especially when providing first-phase response with WASH assistance. However, it is a clear expectation that NCA links its emergency assistance with NCA partners as early as possible, in line with NCA's commitment and support to the localisation agenda in humanitarian response as a signatory to the Charter4Change.



NCA partner GOPA conducts a hygiene course with children in Syria.  
Photo by: Norwegian Church Aid

# NCA'S ROLE AND ADDED VALUE IN PARTNERSHIPS

NCA supports civil society in a variety of ways according to the needs and goals identified in each country/area context and stakeholder analysis. Depending on the type of relationship NCA has with a given civil society actor and the actor's needs and purpose, NCA's roles include:

## **FACILITATOR AND/OR CONVENOR**

NCA provides support to strengthen partners' institutional sustainability and to be capable of fulfilling their role in civil society, as well as to strengthen partners' roles and capacities in humanitarian response

- Providing relevant capacity development measures, either by NCA staff, or through facilitating links to external resources; including establishing EPRPs and capacity development in WASH, GBViE, humanitarian principles etc.
- Linking core partners to resource organisations to strengthen programmes
- Linking core partners, especially faith-based organisations, to relevant networks or platforms in the wider civil society
- Bringing together stakeholders and partners representing different identity groups (different faiths, clans, etc.)
- Exposing partners to relevant programmes and experiences in other countries where NCA works, through exchange visits, Communities of Practice or other meeting points for NCA and partner staff
- Linking constituencies of partners in the South with NCA constituencies in Norway

## **ACCOMPANIER**

NCA provides support to civil society partners and together with them seeks to protect and enhance the political space in which they can operate

- Closely following-up local and national partners in conflict-prone contexts and in long-term development efforts
- Preparing joint development agendas and tailored programmes based on context analyses together with partners

## **CHALLENGER**

NCA engages and challenges religious leaders and faith-based institutions to play a more consistent positive role in society

- Challenging partners to live up to their potential as civil society actors by applying rights-based approaches
- Placing gender justice at the centre of NCA's analyses and programming so that partners are inspired to actively promote just power relations between women and men, girls and boys.

## **BROKER**

NCA may present the partners for new donor opportunities and assist them in achieving additional funding either bilaterally or through consortia

- Facilitating donor contacts, assisting in the development of funding strategies, concepts and proposals



# CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development is an important part of NCA's approach to strengthening civil society. For NCA, the priority of capacity development is to build **strong** and **accountable** civil society actors who are able to meet compliance standards in order to effectively pursue their own goals, mission, and vision.

NCA seeks to strike a balance between internal control/compliance and capacity development relating to internal governance structures, advocacy, fundraising, sustainability standards, and accountability.<sup>12</sup> The latter are key areas to develop both for the long-term sustainability of civil society organisations and for the pursuit of a **vibrant civil society**.

## **NCA's approach to capacity development:**

NCA has a systematic approach to capacity development of its core partners. On an annual basis, country offices assess three to five core partners using NCA's Partnership Assessment Tool. The results from this tool are used to develop Capacity Development Plans jointly with partners. Institutional capacity development of partners may be implemented by NCA staff members, external consultants or other ACT agencies (or other INGOs with whom we coordinate). Whenever possible, NCA coordinates its capacity development plans and initiatives for partner organisations with ACT sister agencies or other INGOs in the country, in agreement with the partner. The following are key areas where capacity development is focused:<sup>13</sup>

## **ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY**

- Internal Democratic Governance
- Sustainability Standards: rights-based approach, gender sensitivity, conflict sensitivity, anti-corruption, environmental impact and accountability (CHS)
- Strategy development
- Fundraising capacity
- Human Resources
- Code of Conduct, including Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) and child safeguarding
- Security (physical, data, etc.)

## **TECHNICAL CAPACITY**

- Advocacy
- Thematic expertise
- Humanitarian preparedness and response including technical capacity in WASH, GBV and ASRH
- Organisational learning, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting

## **FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY**

- Financial systems
- Internal controls
- Reporting processes
- Logistics processes
- Budget processes

<sup>13</sup> Additional areas for capacity development may be identified based on contextual needs

# EXIT STRATEGIES AND PHASING OUT OF PARTNERSHIPS

Although NCA believes in long-term and evolving partnerships, it is important to regularly assess the composition of partner portfolios as strategies evolve in response to contextual changes, and as the funding potential of NCA and partner organisations change. Major shifts in strategies by a partner organisation and/or by NCA, and a shift in the funding priorities of back-donors are often decisive factors leading to the termination of partnerships. NCA's aim is to phase out partnerships in a responsible way with the aim of creating self-sufficient civil society organisations.

Phasing out of financial support does not necessarily mean an end to the partnership, but rather that the partnership has developed into a non-funding relationship. Long-term relationships with faith-based actors like national church councils can continue for as long as NCA works in a given context.

In order to phase out partners in a responsible way, the following steps are taken:

1. Dialogue with the partner on the reasons for phasing out and possible measures to reduce the harm of phasing out
2. Agreement on a minimum phase-out period
3. Development of a phase out strategy outlining measures that NCA will take to mitigate harm such as targeted organisational strengthening, facilitating links to other INGOs or funding opportunities

Partners are normally given a 12 month notice prior to phasing out. A proportional allocation of regular funding should be granted for 12 months from the date of closure decision.

In some cases, NCA must phase out from a partnership on short notice due to suspension of back donor funds. This may prevent NCA from implementing a planned phase out. In instances of fraud, abuse of power or breaches of the code of conduct, NCA can phase out a partner on short notice and follow-up actions might include steps to recover funds and legal action.





**NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID**

actalliance