

The Swallows India Bangladesh

Strategy 2015-2020



Svalorna 
Indien Bangladesh

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Introduction

Our Vision and mission

The vision of The Swallows India Bangladesh is a just world, free from poverty, where people have power to influence their own lives and live in solidarity with each other in a long term, sustainable relationship with nature.

Our mission is to contribute to a society where human rights are respected and where sustainable development within society is viable. We will do this in cooperation with local organisations and the civil society in both South Asia and Europe. In South Asia, we address the root causes of human rights violations at grass roots level and in cooperation with likeminded organisations operating in a variety of the societal structures. In Sweden we focus on advocacy, sustainable consumption, non-discrimination and activism. No matter geographical presence, we will always have solidarity in mind as this is the cornerstone of our ideology and work.

Our aspiration

Since the Swallows India Bangladesh foundation in 1959, there has been a considerable change in the political and social climate in Sweden and the rest of Europe. Today we see a more divided society where division is based on individualism and increased unequal distribution of resources and power. We also see a higher degree weakened institutional social security systems. Within the EU, harsh economic circumstances have developed polarizations in societies and a tendency to divide people in terms of "we and them" based on gender, ethnicity, religion and class. Taking all this in to consideration the values of solidarity are more important now than ever, both in the global North and South. As a consequence The Swallows will continue to be a counter force against extreme individualism, neo colonialism, neo liberalism, capitalism, anti-feminism and xenophobia. The Swallows want to instead highlight the positive messages of human rights, sustainability, equality, solidarity and collective action. This means that in a constantly changing world we must be well prepared for the future, and therefore we have to plan the future steps to be taken. This strategy is a part of that.

We have limited personnel and economic resources when it comes to activities in Sweden, supporting development in the global South and supporting other solidarity forces in the global North. We need to be focused and we have to select areas of work where we think our contributions makes a change. We want to do this in collaboration with like-minded organisations in Sweden and the rest of Europe. Our membership and close links with the Emmaus Movement give us an opportunity to speak with a strong and united voices at both the global and national arena, and our links with other organisations within the Swedish civil society sharpens our messages and give us a broader access to the Swedish public.

The Swallows strategy during the period of 2015-20 is intended as an organisational guiding tool as well as a document concretising our work mainly in Sweden. It aims to illuminate the path forward by establishing the objectives of our work positioning ourselves in relation to the changes and challenges that society is facing and to strengthen our capacity without losing our roots and ideological anchor. Specific strategies for the programmes in India and Bangladesh will be developed with country specific goals based on country context analysis, experience gained so far and trends within respective working areas.

The Effects of Globalisation

Globalisation is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas and other aspects of culture. Advances in transportation and telecommunication infrastructures such as internet are major factors with globalisation, generating further an interdependency of economic and cultural activities. There are different aspects of globalisation such as trade and transactions, capital and investment, migration and movement of people and the dissemination of knowledge. Moreover, exploitative working conditions and environmental challenges such as climate change and the degradation of natural resources are also linked with globalisation.

Globalisation has in many ways facilitated the connection, especially for the civil society and thereby solidarity, between people, organisations and movements in different parts of the world. The Swallows' work and cooperation with organisations in South Asia is one example of that. In addition, a global way of thinking is crucial when fighting global challenges, such as climate change, poverty and discrimination. We must, however, be aware that the benefits of globalisation are not shared equally. The globalisation of corporate capitalism is to a great extent benefitting the world's richest people at the expense of its poorest. The movement of capital results in the transfer of resources from poor to rich countries. Simultaneously the developed parts of the world closes its borders to migration from the South. In the global decision making forums such as IMF, World Bank and WTO, where decisions affecting the world's poor are being made, there is a limited democratic space for poor nations themselves.

There is also a critical globalisation movement relatively strong in Europe and in the US, criticising the cost of the neoliberal agenda, the enormous profit by companies and banks, the centralization of power and social exclusion taking place. Different Social Forums have set strategic agendas through actions taken in for example in Seattle, Washington, Gothenburg etc. However, this global movement and particularly its leadership is not gender sensitive or have a strong analysis on gender as a power relation. Therefore, a parallel movement with, for example, the feminist organisations are criticising the neoliberal and increasingly anti-women and racist agenda.

A rising global trend are conflicts between different religions or within a religion, and in the Global North conflicts between religions is by many means accentuated. At national levels many countries have passed legislation prohibiting the use of religious symbols in public. Other countries have introduced legislation for the same purpose, but not yet passed in their respective parliaments. This issue has caused many outbreaks of public violence and particularly in the Global North it is also linked to racism, xenophobia and islamophobia, not least among ideologically right wing supporters where many have or, have had, links to values closely associated with the Nazi and Fascist ideology. In the Global South conflicts between religions are escalating rapidly which both generate and create problems for the local citizens. Taking this in consideration values of solidarity are now more important than ever, both in the Global North and South. The Swallows will be following this development closely, and when/where possible take appropriate action.

Unequal Distribution of Resources and Power

Poverty is multidimensional which includes lack of equal opportunities, freedom, rights and political power and is not solely a question about financial resources. Inequality and injustice are often the root causes of poverty in the global South as well as the global North. Women and men are discriminated against by unjust economic, social and political structures such as: systems that exclude people from the decision making process, unjust education or health systems, unequal distribution of resources (locally and globally), unjust and discriminatory laws or policies and unjust cultural norms (such as those that consider women or specific societal groups as inferior). Poverty is also a subjective state and the psychological experience and impact of poverty are of utmost importance for the poor themselves.

These unjust structures must therefore be challenged in order to achieve a society where everybody has equal rights and opportunities. **The Swallows is committed to addressing the root causes of poverty through fighting injustice and inequality within the framework of human rights.** This is done by strengthening people to assert their rights and by challenging unjust structures. More importantly, the significance of poverty has to be defined by those who are affected by the unequal distribution of resources and power.

Marginalization - a Process of Discrimination

Marginalisation is the process in which individuals, groups or communities are systematically excluded from, or denied full access to, various rights, opportunities and resources. This includes education, housing, employment, health care, civic engagement, democratic participation etc. Anyone who appears to deviate in any way from the “perceived norms” may thereby become subject to marginalisation. The outcome of marginalisation is that affected individuals, groups or communities are prevented from participating fully and equally in the economic, social and political life of the country or society in which they live. Whether an individuals or a groups rights are respected will to a large extent depend on ones position in society, which is connected to how subscribed identities are given certain status and power, or denial of the same. Marginalised groups and people often face inter-sectional discrimination, being for example poor and belonging to a minority group or of a certain gender.

Intersectionality - a Theory of Discriminatory Structures

The theory of intersectionality explains causes and effects behind discriminatory, oppressive and dominating institutions or systems, such as racism, sexism, caste system, homophobia, classism etc. since they are interconnected and cannot be separated from one another. An intersectional analysis considers a persons´ or groups´ multiple identities, aiming to expose how different types of discrimination and disadvantages occur as a consequence of the combination of identities. It aims to address the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structures the relative position of an individual. It takes into account historical, social and political contexts and also recognizes unique individual experiences resulting from the coming together of different types of identities. An intersectional analysis reveals that people both have privileges and lack privileges in different contexts.

The Swallows standpoint is that structural changes (in terms of institutions, laws, norms, etc.) will not happen unless actors with power change and therefore we will continue supporting organisations working to influence decision makers and laws and policies, ensuring that positive laws and policies are implemented and working to change those that are discriminatory.

Social Movements

Social movements have throughout history been important in bringing people together that carry out or resist social, political or economic change and lifting lack of human rights. Social movements are major vehicles for people’s participation in public politics. Historically, social movements have been drivers for changes of societal structures. At their core they are collectively organised movements governed through representative or direct democratic structures. With globalisation social movements have become even more important as carriers of unity, communication, connection, mobilisation and identity.

During the last decades we have seen the number of non-governmental organisations (NGO’s) rise rapidly all over the world. NGO’s are a highly diverse group of organizations, engaged in a wide range of activities, and take different forms in different parts of the world. Even though they are non-governmental, many are funded by governments, or foundations, businesses, and private persons. Today we see that social movements are growing stronger, not least in the global South and often represent huge segments of society. Some would argue that they are constituting an important counterbalance

to the increasing number of NGO's, even though sometimes there is no clear line between them. Often, social movements are more sensitive to new issues and forms of practising democracy than traditional organisations and institutions. However, social movements are in no way immune to power exercising and inequalities.

The Swallows has been part of the global environmental movement since the seventies and will continue to be so. We are a link for the environmental movement from the global Souths view point and for social movements providing an environmental perspective. In Sweden, we will continue to work for a change towards sustainable lifestyles, which includes means of transport, food, habits, consumption, housing etc. We do so by inspiring individuals to reduce their ecological footprints and work for changes at political levels.

No matter which focus the different social movements have, solidarity is a strong baseline for the majority. Historically The Swallows has worked and been in contact with many different social movements. We do see that many of the issues raised by movements are closely interlinked and that solidarity is the foundations that unite them, which provides the basis for the Swallows' collaboration with different social movements.

The Swallows Cooperation with Civil Society Organisations

The Swallows has a long history of cooperation with organisations belonging to the civil society in the global North and South. Our cooperation principles build on shared values and vision. The basic premise for our cooperation is equality based on dialogue, mutual respect and trust. We view the cooperation in terms of processes where openness and transparency are fundamental. Furthermore we ensure that our supported interventions in the global South are sustainable and do not create long term financial dependency. It is more important than ever to develop the cooperation with organisations which belong to the civil society and are acting on the basis of experience and mutual learning regardless of people's geographical and structural position. We are aware of power relations characterizing cooperation where one party stands for financing and support, while the other party are implementers. Moreover, we believe that an awareness of this fundamental inequality is crucial when forming cooperation with civil society organisations.

Human Rights - Our Framework

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, place of residence, ethnicity, sex, sexuality, gender identity, functionality, skin colour, religion, language, or any other status. All peoples are equally entitled to their human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

As a human rights perspective is our framework all activities supported by the Swallows have a rights based approach. It implies a non-discriminatory alignment and is all inclusive, with the specific aim of strengthening the right holders' opportunities to claim their rights from the duty bearers. Furthermore, a human rights based approach enhances transparency and accountability by public officials. It implies a people centred approach to development and entails building the communities' capacity to understand and claim their rights, whilst making a meaningful contribution to realizing these rights.

Participation as a Part of Human Rights and Democratic Sustainability

Participation is one of the basic fundamentals of human rights in a just and democratic society wherein everyone has the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. Participation is active, free, and meaningful and gives attention to issues of accessibility, including access to information in a form and language which can be understood. Active participation of marginalized women and men in decision making processes develops democratic sustainability, strengthens ownership and gives people an opportunity to influence the local, regional and national political agenda.

Advocacy

Advocacy is an important part of a rights based approach. Through advocacy the civil society can convey their messages to stakeholders and duty bearers. This enables the rights holders to influence decision-makers at all structural levels and to support the development of new policies and laws based on human rights. Advocacy also aims to create awareness among the right holders about the meaning of human rights and to highlight the lack of implementation of existing laws and declarations ratified and signed by their governments.

Critical Perspectives on Universal Human Rights

Stating that human rights is the unique answer to a just world we theoretically simplify complex human social systems and structures. The most convinced followers of a human rights based approach declare that human rights are universal and non-negotiable they are considered as the cornerstone for international laws. However these interpretations and statements are not free from criticism. International Human Rights declarations are perceived by many critics as a new type of western imperialism because the values expressed are mainly anchored in the western hemisphere and based on western values. Critics claim that universal human rights do not take into account human cultural diversity, environmental sustainability, nor weak or non-existing governmental systems.

The Swallows are aware of these critical perspectives. We believe in every individual's right to its own cultural perception of life and dignity, but we know that cultural rights are not unlimited and limitations of these rights begin at the point where one right infringes on another human right. The Swallows acknowledge the limitation that human rights and a rights based approach does not address environmental sustainability and we will ensure that our interventions include an environmental perspective. Finally we follow the idea that no right can be expressed at the expense or destruction of another and they cannot be invoked or interpreted in such a way as to justify any act leading to the denial or violation of a human right and its fundamental freedoms.

Perspectives to be Mainstreamed

Activities supported by The Swallows supported shall be mainstreamed by the following perspectives: Gender and Gender Equality, Environment and Sustainability. To strive towards a just and sustainable society these two perspectives will pervade in all our activities and not one perspective is more important than the others. If one perspective is the main focus of an initiative, both of them will be mainstreamed. This includes organisational policies, guidelines and human resources regulations within The Swallows and amongst its cooperation partners.

Gender

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through the socialization process. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given socio-cultural context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, available opportunities, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making possibilities.

Gender Equality

Gender Equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, rights, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, and recognizing this diversity. Gender equality is not a woman's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

To reach gender equality we have to strive towards structural and behavioural changes at institutional and individual levels as well as a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Only when all members of the society get their rights respected by those responsible - the duty bearers, will we experience a democratic society with values based on equal conditions and non-discrimination. **Gender equality is a precondition for a just and democratic society and The Swallows will continue to focus on gender equality in all its dimensions.**

Environment and Sustainability

The world is facing enormous challenges. Climate change is already now affecting a wide range of people in the world. Furthermore, problems due to severe environmental degradation such as water scarcity, pollution, deforestation, erosion and soil degradation are threatening eco systems around the world and the people depending on them including lives of future generations. If profound changes does not occur in the near future it will soon be too late.

Environmental Justice

When adopting a concept of environmental justice the central arguments are notions of distribution, recognition, capabilities and participation. Furthermore, social justice, sustainable livelihood outcomes and environmental sustainability go hand in hand.

The Swallows recognizes everybody's equal rights to use natural resources in a sustainable manner, emphasizing not only their distribution, but also recognition of marginalized groups to meaningfully be able to participate in the decision-making process around the governance and usage of natural resources. Today there is a global struggle over natural resources, such as land, water, forests and food systems. Big corporations patent seeds that have been used by indigenous people for generations. Other companies, often with support from governments, displace people from their lands or forests to extract minerals or build roads or dams. This is usually done in the name of development but the questions that should be asked is what kind of development is desirable and for whom is the development.

Furthermore environmental justice also emphasises an equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits. Women and men in marginalised communities often pay a higher price and bear greater consequences of environmental destruction and climate change, whilst wealthier people of the world, to a great extent, have been more responsible for the environmental challenges that the world now is facing. Generally the poorer a person or a group are, the smaller generally their ecological footprint. This is not to say that the poor should stay in poverty, but amongst the world's marginalised communities there is valuable knowledge about sustainability. Employing an environmental justice perspective requires curtailing or relooking into the lifestyles of wealthier people whilst recognizing different community's ways of life, local knowledge, and cultural differences. In many areas of the world, the knowledge possessed by local marginalised groups of how to preserve the environment is a key to stop environmental destruction and climate change. Still, there voices are seldom heard on the global arena. In addition, a gender analysis is essential since men globally have a bigger ecological footprint than women and a stronger control over natural resources. Research shows that women also suffer most by environmental injustice as well as when disasters happen.

The Swallows will continue working with people living who are marginalised and living in poverty whose livelihoods are linked to natural resources. In order to achieve long-lasting changes in their lives these people need to (re)gain access and control over natural resources, which will require challenging existing structures. It is important to recognise that successful initiatives will have to complement the principal of a rights-based approach whilst strengthening livelihood opportunities of those who claim their rights. The Swallows will, during the coming strategy period continue supporting initiatives at the forefront of an environmentally sustainable development in the global South as well as the global North.

Changes in the Landscapes of Development Cooperation

As an organisation working with development issues and information activities with support from the Swedish government, The Swallows work is set within the framework of development cooperation that we need to relate to.

The main issue at stake is the aid effectiveness agenda that has emerged through high-level meetings since 2003 in Rome (Paris 2005, Accra 2008, Busan 2011 and Mexico 2014). The process has been coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD), Development Assistance Committee (DAC), whilst simultaneously civil society organisations have been conducting parallel meetings in order to influence the agenda. Issues such as partnership, ownership, harmonisation and increased focus on transparency and results are the core of these discussions.

The Swallows has to relate to the content of these meetings as these trickle down to the Swedish context. The demands on receivers of governmental funds have increased forcefully during the last decade when it comes to internal steering and control, monitoring, reporting and auditing. The Swallows has improved its systems and structures as well as developed new policies so that we are better equipped and more professional in relation to the challenge of aid effectiveness. The consequences of control from the top reflect on our partners in the global South with regards to increased regulations and monitoring. The agenda often tends to have a one-dimensional view on development as quantifiable results, in addition to micro-management and thereby losing out on the larger long-term social changes. **However, The Swallows strategy is to maintain a critical view and scrutinize the scope for long-term development in contrast to short-term results and thereby debate and lift problematic issues within the framework of development cooperation.**

There are interesting shifts taking place in development cooperation globally and within Sweden. 2015 is the year when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire and the new seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are approved. These shifts are also visible here in Sweden, where we are beginning to see the new government's priorities, reflected in foreign policy issues and development cooperation, as well as in investments and priority areas for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida, and Forum Syd. Examples of these are the reintroduction of the Policy for Global Development (PGD), a government that has positioned itself as feminist, in addition to negotiations leading up to the climate summit at COP21 in Paris. **The Swallows views these shifts as an opening to create new opportunities for change, activism and alternatives. We aim to provide a platform for voices from the Global South, whose in-equalities, the goals are meant to address.**

Finally, The Swallows works with themes, in line with the focus of the Swedish government Sida/Forum Syd, such as food sovereignty and livelihood, climate change, gender issues and women's rights. **The Swallows will bring our perspectives of justice, power, solidarity and sustainability into these themes and by doing so challenge the frameworks of aid-techniques so that development does not boil down to quantitative measurement performed yearly, but is seen as a long-term process.**