

What is Diakonia and how do we View the World?

Extract from Diakonia's Global Strategy Plan

2008-2010

Content

PAGE 2 of (14)

Content	2
1: What is Diakonia and how do we View the World?	3
1.2: Our Vision	3
1.3: Overall objective	3
2: Theoretical Framework, Goal and Orientation	4
2.1: Diakonia's Theoretical Approach	4
2.2: Poverty is Multidimensional	4
2.3 Qualitative Participation for a Socially Sustainable Development	4
2.4 Strong Civil Society for Structural Change	4
2.5 Supporting Strategies Leading to Change	4
3: Thematic Areas for our Strategic Work	6
3.1: Democratisation	6
3.2: Gender equality	6
3.3: Human Rights understood and respected	6
3.4: Sustainable peace and conflict management	7
3.5: Social and Economic Justice	7
4: Mainstreamed Areas	8
4.1 Rights Based approach and Human Rights perspective	8
4.2: Gender perspective	8
4.3: HIV and AIDS perspective	8
4.4: Conflict perspective	8
4.5: Environmental perspective	9
4.6: Working pro-actively on Corruption	9
5: What Characterises Diakonia as a Development Organisation?	10
5.1: Diakonia's General Roles, Strategies, and Methods	11
5.2: Supporting Our Partners' strategies	12
5.3: Criteria for choosing partners and for maintaining partnerships	12
5.4: Criteria for choosing country or context for long-term commitment	13
5.5: Criteria for programme building	13

1: What is Diakonia and how do we View the World?

PAGE 3 of (14)

Diakonia is a Swedish NGO with 40 years of experience in international development work. It was originally founded in 1966 and called “Frikyrkan Hjälp” (“Free Church Aid”). At present, Diakonia’s principals are: The Swedish Covenant Church, The Evangelical Free Church (Interact), The Swedish Baptist Church, The Swedish Alliance Mission and The Swedish Methodist Church.

1.2: Our Vision

Diakonia has a vision of a fair and sustainable world, free from poverty, where all women and men can live their lives under dignified circumstances. This vision is based both on a theological foundation and on respect for the universally recognised Human Rights. In consequence, all our international work follows a rights based approach.

1.3: Overall objective

The overall objective of Diakonia’s work is:

”To change unfair political, economical, social and cultural structures that hinder women and men from living their lives in dignified circumstances.”

2: Theoretical Framework, Goal and Orientation

PAGE 4 of (14)

Diakonia's Theoretical Approach: Empowering the poor – challenging the privileged.

2.1: Poverty is Multidimensional

Diakonia defines and analyses poverty as multidimensional, where lack of power, choice and material resources are taken into account, and where formal and informal structures generate and reproduce poverty. This multidimensional view of poverty includes how the individual experiences her or his situation of poverty, i.e. the perspective of the poor.

2.2 Qualitative Participation for a Socially Sustainable Development

Diakonia believes that sustainable development for poverty eradication must be based on the empowerment and qualitative participation of hitherto discriminated groups and individuals. Diakonia believes that such participation is conducive to senses of ownership, responsibility and ultimately empowerment, and when people's participation includes these characteristics, we may speak of a socially sustainable development.

2.3 Strong Civil Society for Structural Change

Given Diakonia's emphasis on the political dimension of a socially sustainable development, citizens' self-organisation for management of common concerns and collective mobilisation for political influence is viewed as crucial. This puts focus on the importance of a strong and vibrant civil society as counterpart to a strong democratic state for effective democratisation and development.

2.4 Supporting Strategies Leading to Change

Diakonia engages in countries and develops programmes by focusing on the identification of dynamic processes for change which are already in motion. In these processes we have come to identify important steps on the way:

1. An increase of citizens' knowledge and awareness on a wide range of issues of direct or indirect political relevance, e.g. social rights, gender equality or legal framework for participation.
2. Citizens' self-organisation around common interests, ideas and concerns as defined by themselves, aiming at solving local concrete problems, as well as advocacy, which may range from women's groups in rural areas to national networks on trade agreements. This component often encompasses the challenge to formalise and develop the organisation or movement democratically.



3. As a crucial part of Diakonia's notion of qualitative participation, lasting effects often result when organised groups of discriminated citizens attain the capacity to act collectively in a political context;
4. Increasing influence and possibilities to achieve concrete improvements, e.g. claiming their right to health or the need to end an armed conflict.

PAGE 5 of (14)

A normal condition for Diakonia's work in developing countries is that it is carried out in contexts where limited development combined with weak and authoritarian states have produced weak and fragmented civil societies. This situation is often underpinned by prevailing elitist and exclusive structures of social, economic and political power. Hence, Diakonia's main rationale for engagement may at times be to focus on strengthening local organisations mobilised around practical needs rather than being strategic or political, e.g. via small-scale productive projects or the provision of basic education. Consequently, the strategies applied and roles played by Diakonia and partners differ between regions, countries and over time. In this way, the qualitative participation of the poor and discriminated in matters of societal concern is not only a means but to a high degree an end in itself, which corresponds to the understanding of democratisation as a long-term process.

3: Thematic Areas for our Strategic Work

3.1: Democratisation

Diakonia works to promote democracy in order to strengthen the participation of hitherto discriminated groups. Except for constitutional frameworks and the rule of law, democracy also includes shared common values at societal level, e.g. solidarity and mutual responsibility. Diakonia views democracy and human rights as interdependent and reinforcing each other – where e.g. the violations of citizens' civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights have serious implications on democracy. Diakonia stresses in particular women's role in democratisation processes.

Democratisation needs to occur on different levels in society. Diakonia puts special focus on empowerment of the poor and democratisation from below. Much of the work is concerned with altering existing institutions so as to allow for increased and equal political participation. But dismantling patriarchal and other norms and attitudes that de facto excludes groups and individuals are also crucial.

3.2: Gender equality

Diakonia works for gender equality by challenging patriarchal structures and attitudes. Gender equality means that women and men share power on an equal basis. It also means that women have the same right to access basic social services, the same opportunities to participate in political and economic decision making, the same right to legal protection and to enjoy the same opportunities as citizens in all aspects of life.

Through the years we have found that the existing gender order cannot be changed without the active participation of men. It is therefore fundamental to encourage men to challenge dominant models of masculinities and organise themselves, and/or together with women to actively participate in the work for gender equality. A gender perspective is equally essential in preventing the spread of HIV.

3.3: Human Rights understood and respected

Diakonia works to spread understanding about and achieve respect for the universally acknowledged human rights, so that all women and men can live a life in dignity. Diakonia uses human rights as a guiding vision and tool to create greater accountability, a more stable society and more equal development where people have access to their basic rights.

The goal of fulfilling human rights means to focus on the most oppressed and discriminated sectors of society, on states' obligations and the formulation of

development objectives where human rights are included. This means that the participants in programs and projects are recognized as right holders.

PAGE 7 of (14)

Since states are the ones to be held accountable for human rights and human security it is important to assure that all state policies are coherent and contributes to the realisation of the universally recognised rights, even in forums not centred on human rights.

3.4: Sustainable peace and conflict management

Diakonia works to create peaceful environments where women and men can live their lives in dignity. Peace is more than just the absence of war or organised violence. It is a situation where all forms of violence are extinct. Such a situation is by no means free from conflict, nor should it be, but conflicts are solved by peaceful and constructive means.

Diakonia believes that the best way of solving conflicts is to institutionalise it within the political system through a structure capable of channelling different interests and points of view to work out compromises. An essential part of such a system is its ability and willingness to fully guarantee the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. In situations of armed conflict, Diakonia puts special focus on the situation of women and the need for their active participation in solving the conflict.

3.5: Social and Economic Justice

Diakonia works for economic justice. To change the political and economic structures that create, maintain and aggravates the resource gap between and within countries. We work to minimise the gap between rich/poor and between men/women, in order to create more equal opportunities for all people to live a life in dignity. From our analysis, social and economic justice can only be achieved with a more equal distribution of resources between women and men.

In order to change the resource distribution in the world it is necessary to look at different flows of resources. Diakonia strives to analyse who the winners and losers are of current and proposed systems, and to proactively promote alternatives that favour a fair distribution. Diakonia and our partners challenge both decision makers and privileged individuals on local, national and international level to take their responsibility to create an equal distribution of development resources.

4: Mainstreamed Areas

4.1 Rights Based approach and Human Rights perspective

Diakonia believes that a rights based approach is highly conducive to socially sustainable development as it recognises the discriminated individuals or groups and victims of violations as right holders. By putting focus on empowering people to demand what is rightfully theirs and on the duty bearers' obligation to grant the rights, the approach not only provides the legal framework and tools to pursue change. It also seeks to empower the rights holders to be the protagonists of change and to be owners of this process.

4.2: Gender perspective

Men and women experience poverty differently and ignoring these differences risks further entrenching poverty and the subordination of women. All Diakonia's work shall include a gender perspective, which takes women's and men's different conditions of life and positions in society into consideration. A central dimension of a gender perspective is to make the unequal distribution of power between women and men visible and contribute to change it.

A gender perspective is today quite visible in all programmes as the result of a number of years of capacity building of partners and staff. All regions have focal persons and task forces for this purpose.

4.3: HIV and AIDS perspective

To mainstream HIV and AIDS related issues means to revise each theme and prioritised area and identify the relation between the theme and HIV and AIDS. In many of the contexts where Diakonia operates this is an absolute necessity as HIV and AIDS are so widespread that they are having impact on everything in society, not least on the rights holders' ability to participate. This is a process which leads to changing attitudes and increasing understanding of a very complex subject area.

Today there are focal persons in every region and during the next three years they will be linked to regional task forces. Drawing from our experience of mainstreaming gender, further efforts are needed before mainstreaming can be considered consolidated.

4.4: Conflict perspective

The strengthening of civil society organisations' capacity to mobilise and define concrete political proposals will, if successfully done, imply an alteration of the current balance of power. The empowerment of one group will scarcely come about without other social groups feeling challenged or even threatened. The

possible unintentional escalation of such a conflict into a destructive or even violent one will depend on the actions and reactions of both parties. Therefore it is necessary that Diakonia and partners, regardless of thematic orientation, always show awareness and sensitivity to such risks, and take the proper measures to minimise them through a conflict analysis, identifying all relevant stakeholders in the process.

PAGE 9 of (14)

4.5: Environmental perspective

Diakonia does not focus specifically on environmental issues, but has begun to make efforts for incorporating an environmental perspective as well as a climate perspective in our analysis and activities.

4.6: Working pro-actively on Anti-Corruption

Diakonia has a history of acting swift and decisively in cases where corruption such as embezzlement or fraud has been discovered in our programs. Such considerations are crucial when choosing partners, and when building their capacity with regards to democratic practices, financial transparency, administrative routines, and an active involvement of both poor women and men in decision-making.

Working from a rights-based approach (including human rights and democratic core values) the aim is to develop pro-active strategies with our partners. These strategies include the active empowerment of poor women and men to be able to gain influence and to keep their organisations, politicians and local government officials accountable for their decisions and provision of public services.

Diakonia has through our PME Handbook developed practical routines for how our staff shall act and report when financial or administrative irregularities are discovered. Diakonia has a zero-tolerance level for misuse of funds or abuse of entrusted powers.

5: What Characterises Diakonia as a Development Organisation?

PAGE 10 of (14)

a. Close to the processes, both in the developing and developed countries

The main part of Diakonia's staff works in or near the countries where partners operate. Diakonia's decentralised organisation with both regional and country offices facilitates a partnership characterised by trust, contextual analysis, strategic choice of partners and projects, identification of partners' needs for capacity building, linking between partners, and to information work in Sweden, as well as planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes.

b. Participatory approach

Just as the rights holders' qualitative participation is at the core of the projects Diakonia supports, so is participation a leading principle in all internal processes in Diakonia. As much as possible partners also participate in Diakonia's planning and monitoring, to guarantee ownership and quality. For all partners a certain match between our identities is required in the sense that values and priorities are shared, but beyond that the relation is in reality very much characterised by a give and take ending up in mutual influence and learning. What is important is that Diakonia's opinions and analyses contribute to partners' and rights holders' perspectives on the work, rather than jeopardising their sense of ownership over the projects. Without local ownership, the projects cannot be considered socially sustainable.

c. Proactive agenda to alter structures that generate and maintain poverty

In Diakonia's long-term work for change focus is put on changing the structures that generate and maintain poverty. Our programmes should not merely deliver direct benefits to poor and discriminated women and men, but also address the root causes of the problems experienced. Also, in our advocacy work we do not merely react on others agendas and proposals, but proactively tries to influence the agenda and propose alternative solutions.

5.1: Diakonia's General Roles, Strategies, and Methods

PAGE 11 of (14)

a) Donor and controller

Diakonia finances its activities through various channels. In terms of financial priorities, the organisation is above all a donor financing partners and projects in developing countries. The primary task is thus to identify strategic actors and projects to fund and to develop the routines necessary to monitor and follow up on the proper use of these funds.

b) Accompanying partner

It is of fundamental importance to develop a reliable relationship, characterised by trust, between Diakonia and each partner. Through long term relations and local presence, a relationship based on mutual respect is developed. This is crucial to effectively implement our controlling function, an effective monitoring and a full comprehension of the expected or unexpected outcomes. Diakonia see partners' institutional capacity building as a central issue and a field where we can bring in added value. Diakonia sometimes take a very active role in facilitating partners' capacity building while working closely together, e.g. using the Gender manual, as long as the ownership of the initiative is not put at risk.

c) Bridge builder and catalyst

Diakonia plays an important role as a bridge builder between partners within and between country programmes. Diakonia has experienced that meetings between partners at different levels in society generate increased knowledge and added value. As an example, Diakonia assists in linking advocacy NGO:s with grassroots organisations. An important tool is the regular partner meetings where the work and the conditions for it are discussed and where sharing of experiences and analyses become possible. When composing a programme not only the individual potential of each partner is taken into consideration, but also to create fruitful synergies between partners in the country group.

d) Advocacy and Public Awareness

In Sweden and internationally, Diakonia works with public awareness and advocacy to inform and influence the general public and decision makers about the situation in developing countries and how it can be changed. Diakonia works with evidence based advocacy to influence and change harmful Swedish and European policies, in cooperation with our partners and as a complement to their work. In developing countries, Diakonia often seeks dialogue with representatives of the European Union, UN agencies, embassies, and other international institutions present to discuss the same issues.

5.2: Supporting Our Partners' strategies

Regardless of whether the focus is political, social, cultural, economic development or all at once, our partners' promotion of qualitative participation which we support can generally be broken down into four main yet interrelated strategies:

- a) awareness raising,
- b) organisation,
- c) action and
- d) advocacy/influence.

Without underestimating the intrinsic value of awareness and the social and possibly psychological effects of being part of a group dynamic, ultimately the first two strategies aim at the last, to possess the knowledge, the tools and the strength to be able to change ones reality.

5.3: Criteria for choosing partners and for maintaining partnerships

Normally, a Diakonia country programme is composed of various organisations. All partner organisations are assessed regularly. The criteria should be fulfilled by all partners where partner organisations as a minimum should:

- Share Diakonia's values as expressed in our policy.
- Sympathise with Diakonia's vision, general problem analysis and over all objective to change unjust structures.
- Be clearly oriented towards reaching outcomes and impacts beyond the activities
- Possess administrative skills, or willingness to acquire such skills, in order to fulfil Diakonia's formal requirements.
- Be willing to participate with other partners and networks that emerge or may emerge as a result of the partner group and Diakonia coming together.
- Have or be willing to adjust to formal and actual structures in order to exercise transparency, accountability, participation, influence, non-discrimination.
- Fulfil or be willing to fulfil Diakonia's gender indicators during the programme period. This regards the organisation's internal structure and culture as well as within the projects.
- In HIV/AIDS affected regions, be willing to analyse the socioeconomic consequences of HIV/AIDS for the rights holders and adjust the work accordingly.

5.4: Criteria for choosing country or context for long-term commitment

PAGE 13 of (14)

Diakonia considers ten criteria when assessing the possibility of opening a new country programme for long-term commitment. The criteria are also used when considering the closure of a programme.

- Criteria 1: Countries not in Europe
- Criteria 2: Countries which are poor, oppressed and exposed to violence
- Criteria 3: Degree of organisation in civil society
- Criteria 4: Diakonia's thematic focus in relation to the contextual analysis
- Criteria 5: Diakonia should have a long term strategic perspective
- Criteria 6: The need for Diakonia in comparison to donors already present.
- Criteria 7: Diakonia's own capacity
- Criteria 8: Possibility of fundraising and information in Sweden for the country
- Criteria 9: Regional links with other Diakonia country programs
- Criteria 10: Strategic partners for advocacy in Sweden, EU and on the International level

It's important to note that the criteria are not absolute. Programmes can be justified even though all criteria are not equally fulfilled. Nevertheless, all of these are always taken into account.

5.5: Criteria for programme building

A programme should be designed to be as powerful and strategic as possible. In doing so it may be tempting to only support skilful NGOs, thematic experts and lobby strategists. These actors can obviously play an important role in a programme, but the base of a programme should be grassroots' organisations of different kinds. The role of NGOs should be complementing and facilitating. Without the support and leadership of member based organisations, civil society will pose no challenge for power holders, nor will the agendas hold any legitimacy or sustainability if they address problems and suggest solutions for people that never participated in their elaboration. At the same time, NGOs are often better equipped in terms of analysis and tools than are grassroots' organisations.

Related to this is the idea to construct programmes where Diakonia's added value is maximised. By constituting a platform and meeting point for partner organisations Diakonia should consider the "supply and demand" of knowledge and skills within the partner group. In a well constructed programme both these are met. On the supply side it is crucial that the programme includes competence on gender perspective and advocacy as Diakonia's overall development objective is not considered achievable without them.

Except for the above criteria, country programmes should:

PAGE 14 of (14)

- Be designed in complete accordance with Diakonia’s basic values and policy.
- Be strategically elaborated and grounded in each context based on an updated contextual analysis in which a variety of national actors have participated.
- Be based upon an analysis of the existing civil society, its problem analysis, chosen priorities, and ongoing processes in which they intervene.
- Be concentrated geographically to facilitate the possibility for partners within the programme to meet and exchange ideas.
- Include cross cutting issues around which partners gather, qualitative participation being the strongest.
- Be primarily designed to strengthen grassroots’ organisations and facilitate the achievement of their objectives, e.g. in collaboration with NGOs.
- Have, or strive towards, a clear gender perspective and include at least one organisation who primarily works for equality between women and men.
- Give an added value in relation to the priorities of other donor agencies; be complementary to other Diakonia programmes.