POLICY
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DIAKONIA’S POLICY IS the key document steering the work of the organisation. It is a living document guiding and permeating the long-term operational planning of Diakonia and its partner organisations.

The policy is rooted in a set of fundamental values – a belief in the equal worth of all people, irrespective of race, religion or ethnicity and in the right of every individual to live in dignified circumstances in a global community where far too many people currently live in poverty and vulnerability.

The policy is also directly related to Diakonia’s task and mandate – to seek God’s will and, on the basis of Christian values, to work for human liberation and restoration and for the creation or reestablishment of fair and just social and economic structures. Diakonia does this by analysing the forces behind injustice and conflict using Biblical and theological perspectives together with cultural and socio-economic perspectives and by seeking alternative solutions. Diakonia works to tackle the distribution of global resources – exposing unjust structures and working towards a just distribution.

The policy has been developed and written through the active involvement of our international partner organisations, our founding denominations and first and foremost Diakonia staff all over the world.

The process has been characterised by discussion, analysis and the exchange of knowledge and experience. It has been guided by a desire and openness to understand the structural and other causes of poverty, oppression and vulnerability. And above all by the dream and vision of a better world where all people live in peace, where there are no new conflicts, no increase in the flows of refugees, where the gaps
This document is the result of people’s conviction, belief, commitment and visions and the view that this can all be converted into concrete action.

between rich and poor are not widening and where our shared natural resources are not exploited to the enrichment of a few.

The result of this process is the document you now hold in your hands – Diakonia’s policy.

This document is a revision of the policy document Diakonia adopted in 1994. We are convinced that the themes formulated at the time – democracy, human rights, economic justice and gender – continue to be core themes, central to a global perspective in the decade to come.

One theme has been added – peace and reconciliation. This has been added as many of the countries in which Diakonia works are scenes of armed conflict. Diakonia’s work for democracy and human rights has to reflect and relate to this fact. In order to consider the entirety of challenges facing the global human community and understand the connections between these challenges we have also provided an opening to integrate environmental and climate issues in the organisation’s work.

It is not easy to orient yourself in global developments unfolding at an ever-increasing pace and in the plethora of actors and special interests. On the one hand, there is the geopolitical play of international politics with the fight for energy resources, the profits of multinational companies and the adaptation of regions and countries to global development. On the other hand, there is the will and ambition to strengthen democracy and popular participation in building and governing society, to increase respect for human rights and to strengthen work for development that is sustainable in the long-term.

This document is the result of people’s conviction, belief, commitment and visions and the view that this can all be converted into concrete action. This is the policy and guidelines of Diakonia. When there is hope and courage people will change the world.

Bo Forsberg
General Secretary
This is Diakonia
Diakonia is the joint development agency of the Swedish Alliance Mission, the Baptist Union of Sweden, InterAct, the United Methodist Church and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden. The organisation was founded in 1966 under the name Frikyrkan Hjälper (Swedish Free Church Aid). It changed its name to Diakonia in 1985. The five founding churches also conduct their own development work, often linked to sister churches in various parts of the world. In both its analytical and its practical work, Diakonia strives to cooperate and coordinate with the churches.

“Diakonia” is Greek and means ministering or serving. When first used in the Christian tradition the word described the work of the local congregation to secure a just distribution of commonly held resources. The primary task of “diakonia” is thus the just distribution of the abundant riches of creation.

Diakonia is a part of the churches’ worldwide mission. This mission constitutes a whole, and Diakonia’s role within that whole is to work with the social dimension of mission, which is an indispensable part of the gospel. We understand our work to be one expression of the call to the Christian church to serve people beyond all borders, and we cooperate with people from different religions and beliefs.

Diakonia’s mission is to seek God’s will and, based on our Christian values, to work for human liberation and restoration, and for the creation or reestablishment of fair and just social and economic structures. This is achieved through:

- Analysing the forces behind injustice and conflict, both from a biblical and theological perspective and from a
Diakonia has a vision of a world where all people live in dignified circumstances in a just and sustainable world, free from poverty.

Diakonia’s part in the mission of the church is to share the burden of others and in this way bear witness to Christian faith through a network of human relations. Selfless love focuses on the needs of others. It is the basis for dialogue and cooperation in our meeting with other people, including those of different faiths and beliefs.

Together we are people changing the world.

**Diakonia’s vision**

Diakonia has a vision of a world where all people live in dignified circumstances in a just and sustainable world, free from poverty. All people are part of God’s sacred creation and created in God’s image. This is the meaning of human dignity and applies to all people irrespective of religion, gender, ethnicity, colour, sexual orientation, language, ideological or political beliefs, national or social origin, property, birth or any other status.

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasises the rights of individuals and in a clear and coherent manner defines what is meant by a dignified life. All these rights are universal, indivisible and of equal value. They are mutually dependent on one another and jointly necessary for every person to have the opportunity to live in dignity. The conventions developed based on the Universal Declaration take their point of departure in the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings. They form the basis for the work of Diakonia, and we attempt to carry out all our work from a rights based perspective.

There are also other values and elements that Diakonia associates with a dignified life, even if these are not expressly dealt with by the UN declaration of Human Rights. These include the necessity of
safeguarding creation, enabling people to live in peace and reducing economic and social divisions between people.

A dignified life also requires community with others. People cannot live in isolation: they find affirmation through meeting and sharing their lives with others. Each individual should have the freedom to choose to which spiritual and cultural community they wish to belong. However, each person – irrespective of what lifestyle they have chosen – also has a responsibility for the community at large. A dignified life requires a functioning society, characterised by trust between people, justice, solidarity and mutual responsibility.

The Theological basis of Diakonia

Diakonia’s identity and work is grounded in the Christian belief in God as Creator, Saviour and Sustainer of all life. As humans, we are called by God to counteract the destructive forces damaging creation and to uphold the inherent worth of all people, given at creation.

Creation is sacred, good and complete, but at the same time destroyed, distorted and shattered. This duality applies to us as humans too – capable of love and goodness, but also capable of hate and destruction. Humans are at once the keepers and destroyers of creation. Our imperfection is evident both in the daily interaction between people and in the wider global structures ruling human life.

Belief in divine, unconditional and selfless love is the basis and normative point of departure for all of Diakonia’s work and our analysis of the world. Following in the footsteps of Christ, the church is called to carry the message of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, atonement and new life into the world, making the prayer of Christ clear in word and deed: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”. Diakonia is part of the mission and the work of the church.
The theological basis of Diakonia’s work is developed through a process that brings together various aspects: interpreting the Bible and the Christian tradition, meetings with our partner organisations and other churches, and our own experiences. This process emanates from a number of central themes in the gospel: freedom, power, responsibility, justice, hope, peace and reconciliation.

**Freedom**

Understood in terms of Christian belief, freedom means that no individual, group or power structure has the right to violate the human rights of another individual. Throughout creation humans were given the freedom to choose between good and evil, and to take responsibility for the choices we make.

From this perspective Diakonia works for human rights to be respected, for equality between men and women, for the rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of belief and freedom from starvation, poverty and oppression. Each individual has the right to develop according to his or her own capacity without being limited by the prejudice or stereotypical expectations of others.

**Power**

Diakonia has chosen to side with marginalised people and work for their right to determine their own lives. All sustainable change in the world takes place through the joined efforts and will of many individuals. The God of creation is also the God of history who chose selfless love to bring about change and who works in history through people, both individually and collectively. They are people changing the world.

The unjust distribution of power maintains a whole series of oppressive hierarchies. People are denied their inherent worth, for example due to their sex, ethnicity, age, colour or financial status. Diakonia works for gender equality and for reinforcing the power and
Each individual has the right to develop according to their own capacity without being limited by the prejudice or stereotypical expectations of others.
The ability of oppressed and marginalised groups to challenge the structures that bind people in negative roles. The belief in a God who was crucified and rose again challenges us to question continuously the ways in which power is exercised in the world and our own methods in working for change. For example, to question the patriarchal values that are also a part of the Christian tradition.

Our belief is that long-term work done in love and solidarity, with the vision of a just and dignified life for all will in fact change the world, both for individuals and in terms of global structures.

**Responsibility**

The Christian message points to both personal and shared responsibility. Each person is responsible for his or her own life and for that of the community at large. Democracy is the form of governance which best expresses the fundamental ideas in the Bible regarding the equal worth, rights and obligations of all people. It is therefore Diakonia's task to work for a deepening of democracy, both in the formal sense and in terms of a culture of democratic values that should permeate society at all levels.

According to the Christian faith, humans are the stewards of creation, responsible for sustainable development.

**Righteousness**

Underlying the Christian claim for social and economic justice is the belief in God’s righteousness. Injustice awakens the anger and sorrow of God. What the claim entails is that the earth’s resources should be distributed equitably. All people should have a share in the world’s resources and participate in its development, irrespective of economic and social status.

Throughout the Bible, power structures that oppress people are challenged. In word and deed, Jesus saw matters from the perspective of the poor, hungry, ill, naked and homeless. This perspective is also
Throughout the Bible, power structures that oppress people are challenged. In word and deed, Jesus saw matters from the perspective of the poor, hungry, ill, naked and homeless. This perspective is also fundamental to Diakonia. Our wish is to be a prophetic voice striving for a just society, both at the global level and in particular countries.

Hope
In a world torn apart by conflict and injustice the contribution of Christian faith is the hope that a better world, the kingdom of God, is possible and will one day be a reality. Christian hope concerns not only life after death, but also the fulfilment of God’s will today. Hope provides motivation and endurance in a chaotic world. It is a force already creating change.

Peace and reconciliation
Peace and reconciliation are words used in the Bible to describe people’s relationship with God, other people and creation. Peace involves safeguarding the life of each person, physically and mentally, and preserving creation. It is our task as Christians to strive for peace for all people on earth.

This is the basis of Diakonia’s work with peace building. With the belief in resurrection and new life after the most burdensome of crises, Christian faith provides hope even in apparently hopeless circumstances. Reconciliation is a process that goes beyond basic justice and reconstruction. The Christian hope is that reconciliation will lead to new life and new values despite unendurable experiences.

Diakonia’s partners have delivered school books and uniforms to children who lost their belongings in the tsunami. Geetha, 11 years old, lives in one of the most affected areas in Sri Lanka. Photo: Markus Marcetic/Moment.
today we live in a globalised world where development trends are often complex and contradictory. Trade, technology and economic investments weave a web of mutual dependence that in some ways reduces the distance between people and countries. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), from 1990 to the writing of this policy the average human being is healthier, better educated and less poor. Furthermore, the chances of the average person living in a democracy have increased. At the end of this same period, over 130 million people, primarily in Asia, no longer live in extreme poverty. This progress in human development must not be underestimated.

At the same time, the progress made should not be exaggerated. Differences in income and opportunities remain or are even on the increase. More than one billion people – 70 per cent of whom are women – are still forced to survive on less than one US dollar a day. People deprived of a secure and dignified place in society end up in its margins. In many cases they take refuge in alcohol and drug abuse, which in turn represents a serious obstacle to positive development. One in four children in the world today live in utmost destitution.

The wealthiest one fifth of the world’s population uses four fifths of its resources. The world’s poor are also the most exposed to the effects of local and global environmental degradation. They frequently lack or are deprived access to their own natural resources. Climate change represents one of the greatest threats to sustainable development and a dignified life for all.

The HIV and Aids pandemic has created the single most notable regression in human development in the history of humankind. In some countries whole generations have been practically wiped out or
Diakonia’s understanding of the state of the world
Eradicating poverty and creating just and sustainable development continues to be humanity’s foremost challenge.

18-year-old Nisansala (third person from the left) and her friends in Sri Lanka learn how to weld through Diakonia’s partner Women’s Development Centre. Photo: Markus Marcetic/Moment.
have drastically reduced opportunities to contribute to the development of their societies.

We live in a period of migration. Throughout the world, poverty has created millions of political, economic and ecological refugees, making their way to wealthier areas, above all to the world’s urban areas, in the hope of a more dignified life.

Eradicating poverty and creating just and sustainable development continues to be humanity’s foremost challenge. The face of poverty varies between people and societies. However, its key feature is always the same – poverty deprives people of the opportunity to influence and shape their own lives. It involves a lack of material resources, a lack of power and influence and a lack of choice.

From a global perspective opportunities have never been greater. In today’s world we have the technology, the financial resources and the collective knowledge of how to wipe out extreme poverty. There is global consensus on development issues, as expressed in the Millennium Declaration. Unfortunately, it has yet to turn into practical action, and the prospects for the coming decade continue to be uncertain. However, there is increasing awareness that a future world order based on mass poverty amidst affluence is economically inefficient, politically unstable and morally indefensible.

At the same time, major geopolitical changes are taking place that will be of importance to world development. The current major economic powers are increasingly challenged, both economically and politically, by for example China, Brazil and India. This will have fundamental implications for development not just in these countries but for the whole world. The great challenge is to create welfare for all people without an increase in activities that degrade the environment and causes conflict over natural resources. Above all this will require the wealthier nations of the world to change unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.
Patriarchal values permeate culture, religion and traditions and in this manner contribute to both men and women conserving and consolidating the subordinate position of women."
**Human rights are violated and challenged**

It is positive that large parts of civil society have started using a rights-based approach, using the various conventions on human rights as tools in their work. However, violations of human rights are still a common occurrence. Far too many of the world’s poor and vulnerable remain unaware of their rights or lack the opportunity to assert them. Civil society organisations frequently criticise the UN and its members for being far too lenient on governments guilty of violations. The UN system remains relatively weak and lacks the capability to use effective sanctions to ensure human rights are respected.

It is alarming that the status of human rights is increasingly questioned. Are they really valid as universal and independent moral, political and judicial norms? In certain countries the “War on Terror” has resulted in the disregard of human rights. There is a clear danger that the war against terrorism will undermine work to deepen democracy and respect for international law in many parts of the world.

**Challenges for democracy**

The wave of democratisation that has swept through the world in recent decades has contributed to great steps forward for millions of people in relation to freedom and human rights. However, the new democracies have often faced difficulties in living up to expectations of social and economic development. Structural injustices have often remained or even worsened due to corruption and the abuse of power. People’s participation and opportunities to influence the political system have been seriously impeded by prevailing structures and conditions. This affects women in particular, as they are systematically marginalised in decision-making bodies at all levels.

Globalisation brings with it great challenges for representative democracy and the nation state. The opportunities for national governments to pursue their own policies are limited, while flexibility increases in capital and labour markets and the influence of dominant transnational companies grows. Elected governments are required to
pay at least as much attention to credit providers and market forces as to their own voters. Despite attempts at reform, the UN system is still largely dominated by the permanent members of the Security Council. Decisions made in other international institutions and organisations also tend to favour wealthy nations and transnational companies. On several occasions, the poor and vulnerable have been caught in the middle as the international community has reacted to the results of national elections won by the “wrong” party.

All these challenges run the risk of undermining confidence in the democratic system and reducing people’s will to get involved. This represents a considerable challenge to those working to promote qualitative participation and the formation of a vibrant democracy.

Lack of gender equality

Even if a majority of countries have signed the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, equality between women and men remains a very distant reality. In most societies women are still subordinate to men. Women and what is feminine are considered inferior and of less value than men and what is masculine. Lack of gender equality is a structural phenomenon found at all levels of society. In these power relations – also known as patriarchy – men’s power over women is institutionalised in economics, politics, family life, sexuality etc. Patriarchal values permeate culture, religion and traditions and in this manner contribute to both men and women conserving and consolidating the subordinate position of women.

Men as a group are favoured by prevailing gender power relations in terms of power, status and access to resources. However, neither men nor women are homogenous groups. The opportunity for men to profit from the benefits provided by the gender power relations further depends on other factors such as class, ethnicity, age and sexual
orientation. There is a hierarchy not only in terms of the power of men over women, but also between different groups of men and between different kinds of masculinity. This unjust order can only be maintained with the help of gender-based violence. Men commit ninety percent of all violence, and it affects both women and men. This has had, not least, fateful consequences for the sexual and reproductive rights of women and for the spread of HIV among women. Gender-based violence is a major threat to sustainable development.

However, men also pay a price for their privileged position in the form of self-destructive behaviour and emotional degeneration. The lack of gender equality is therefore not a women’s issue but represents just as big a challenge for men as it does for women.

Unjust distribution of resources

The current world order is anything but just. The differences in human development are as clear within as between nations. The gap is widening between the wealthiest nations and the poorest, primarily in Africa, as well as between the richest and poorest people in societies with a relatively high level of wealth. Poverty in the world is not caused by a lack of resources, but by an unjust distribution of these resources. There are enough resources globally to provide for the fundamental needs of all people, but the ecological capacity of the planet is overstretched and at the local level, there is often a lack of resources to fulfil people’s basic needs.

The causes of this unequal distribution of resources are often complex. Disparities may develop due to discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, income or your geographical roots. Historical background, patriarchal structures, an uneven concentration of power at national and international levels, corruption, unequal access to information, resistance to changes in redistribution policy from elites and unjust global policies and regulations all contribute in their different ways to the existing order of things. The differences are in themselves unjust, but they are also economically wasteful and socially destabilising. Combating the structural forces that create and maintain major injustices
is one of the most effective ways to combat poverty and create a dignified life for all.

**Conflict**

If social conflicts are not averted or solved, they may easily escalate and develop into armed conflicts. In turn, these constitute one of the causes of mass poverty, marginalisation and powerlessness. Instability caused by armed and violent conflict is still one of the major obstacles to human development. However, the deadly interplay between poverty and violent conflict does not only affect the immediate victims: it poses a serious threat to the security of the entire international community. It is highly disconcerting that the “War on Terror” has been allowed to put the UN system and international law out of play. Instead, so-called “preventative” warfare is being conducted with fateful consequences and large numbers of civilian casualties.

However, the majority of conflicts today take place not between countries but within them. Ethnicity and religion are frequently said to cause armed conflicts. Ethnic and religious differences are often a dimension differentiating conflicting parties, but the conflicts in themselves usually arise, proceed from and escalate due to the struggle for control over important national resources. Thus, ethnic and religious affiliation seldom constitutes the root cause of a conflict, but can reinforce such conflicts and serve as a powerful tool for mobilisation. Gravely, gender-based and sexual violence has become a systematic tool of warfare in many conflicts, with devastating effects above all for women and children. This has also contributed to the spread and escalation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Audo was seven years old when the family’s house was burnt down and everyone were forced to flee immediately. Many died in the fights between the tribes kosasi and mapusi. As a consequence of the conflict poverty is growing in Ghana, which already is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Photo: Robban Andersson.
The orientation of Diakonia’s work

Together with its partner organisations Diakonia has reached the conclusion that fundamental problems that prevent people from living a dignified life need to be dealt with in order to create just and long-term sustainable development. Human structures are the basic cause of many of the problems that we experience in the world today: hunger, abuse and violence, environmental degradation, housing shortages, unemployment, addiction, lack of access to healthcare and education, etc. However, humans can change human structures. Instead of being part of the problem, they can become part of the solution. Thus, as a concrete application of our vision, the overall goal of Diakonia is to change the unjust political, economic, social and cultural structures preventing people from living a dignified life.

Since Diakonia’s resources are limited, it is essential to focus the work on a limited number of issues. Based on the mission and mandate given by our founding churches, our vision, our understanding of the state of the world, and our previous experience, we have chosen to focus on the following themes, which are interdependent and in part overlapping.

- Human Rights
- Democratisation
- Gender Equality
- Social and Economic Justice
- Peace and Reconciliation

In addition to the five prioritised themes, we seek to ensure that a rights-based perspective, as well as a gender, HIV & Aids, conflict and environmental perspective all permeate the work of Diakonia.

"The majority of conflicts today take place not between countries but within them. Ethnicity and religion are frequently said to cause armed conflicts."
Human Rights

Diakonia works for greater awareness of and respect for universally acknowledged human rights so that all women and men have the opportunity to live a dignified life. We use human rights as a guideline and tool in our efforts to develop societies characterised by people taking responsibility, stability, increased gender equality and the basic rights of all people being met.

For Diakonia, striving for human rights to be respected means focusing on the most vulnerable people and on the obligations of states towards their citizens. We particularly focus on the rights of women, who, despite making up the majority of the world's population, are systematically discriminated due to their sex.

Since governments bear the main responsibility for safeguarding the respect of human rights it is important that they create and maintain functional institutions for this purpose. Diakonia’s aim is that policies and regulations created by international financial institutions and organisations will contribute to upholding respect for human rights. We also seek to shed light on any lack of concurrence between such policies and regulations and the conventions on human rights and agreements of similar status. In situations of non-concurrence, UN regulations and the conventions on human rights must take precedence.

Democratisation

Diakonia works to increase democracy, to support people’s integration into society and their participation in community life. Our focus is on supporting poor and vulnerable groups who organise themselves in order to increase their ability to participate in and influence the governance of their societies. The participation of women, who are frequently discriminated in public decision-making processes, is of particular importance.

Diakonia advocates participatory democracy. We emphasise the fact that people are social beings who, in order to develop our full potential, need to live in community with others in an environment
characterised by equality, trust and common interests. Democracy must give each individual access to means of political influence and the opportunity to participate in the development of his or her society.

Participation, influence and ownership are core qualities of what it means to be a citizen of a democracy. These qualities can be summarised by the term “empowerment”, meaning to strengthen people's self-esteem and their commitment to participate actively in processes seeking to change their situation. In this way, democracy is built from below, something Diakonia considers necessary as vested power interests do not break up of their own accord. Democracy “from below” requires a civil society with strong organisations, with the capacity to represent people and to advocate their interests in the political process.

Diakonia works to ensure that elected parliamentarians and representatives of civil society have increased insight into and opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes of international institutions and organisations. We also work to ensure that international decisions and regulations do not undermine developing countries’ freedom to choose development strategies themselves, appropriate to their specific context and stemming from their own democratic processes.

Gender Equality
Diakonia works for gender equality through challenging patriarchal structures and attitudes. Our work on gender includes all people irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity. For Diakonia, gender equality means women having the same rights, opportunities and obligations as men. Examples include access to basic social services, opportunities to take part in political and economic decision-
making processes and the right to legal protection. Equality does not mean women and men becoming the same. On the contrary, Diakonia asserts all people's right to individuality, with both women and men possessing the freedom to develop their own personal qualities and make their own choices without being limited by stereotypical and rigid gender roles.

Diakonia's work for gender equality primarily focuses on supporting women in their struggle against discrimination and suppression. At the same time, we realise that current gender power relations cannot be changed without the active participation of men. A basic premise for sustainable gender equality is that men gain awareness, take responsibility and actively involve themselves in the struggle against unjust gender structures. Thus, men have to be encouraged to question current models of masculinity, to organise themselves as a group, and/or to participate actively in gender equality work together with women. This is also a strategically important element in the work to reduce the spread of HIV.

Our ambition is to integrate a gender perspective in all aspects of Diakonia's work by always considering the differing opportunities and positions in society of women and men. A gender perspective should permeate the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and projects.

Social and Economic Justice

Diakonia works to change the political and economic structures that create, maintain and widen the gaps between rich and poor, both within and between countries. We strive to create equitable and gender equal conditions and opportunities for all people to live a dignified life.

In order to influence the distribution of resources both within countries and at the global level, it is essential to analyse many different flows of resources such as trade, aid, debt repayment, debt cancellation, distribution of land, micro credits, remittances from

Peace is more than the absence of war or organised violence. True peace means that all forms of violence are eradicated and social conflicts are solved by peaceful and constructive means.
migrant workers, corruption and taxation systems and policies. All these flows influence the distribution of resources between rich and poor and between men and women. Diakonia attempts to analyse who the winners and losers are both in current and proposed systems, in order to suggest proactive alternatives that promote the fight against poverty and a fair distribution of resources.

This work needs to be carried out at many levels in society. We work to strengthen the self-esteem of poor people, especially women, as well as their opportunities to change their own lives, for example through securing an income that makes it possible to live a dignified life. Helping people to help themselves is a guiding principle for our partner organisations at grass roots level. However, Diakonia also challenges those people in society who are privileged and carry responsibilities. Those who are rich and in positions of power, the majority of whom are men, will inevitably have to give up some of their privileges if a more equal distribution of resources is to be attained. We challenge decision-makers at local, national and international level to take responsibility for enabling a just sharing of power and resources for development. We also address actors within international financial institutions and organisations. Their policies and agreements have a bearing on poor people and countries’ opportunities and ability to create a just and sustainable development.

Peace and Reconciliation
Diakonia works to support the building of peaceful communities and societies where women and men are able to live a dignified life. Peace is more than the absence of war or organised violence. True peace means that all forms of violence are eradicated and social conflicts are solved by peaceful and constructive means.
We challenge decision-makers at local, national and international level to take responsibility for enabling a just sharing of power and resources for development.
Diakonia promotes political structures that are open to different interests and points of view and able to negotiate compromises. A crucial part of such structures is their ability and willingness to fully guarantee the respect of human rights, international humanitarian law and a just distribution of resources. Putting human rights at the forefront of political priorities is key to changing the underlying social and economic structures behind armed conflict, in favour of improving the situation for poor and vulnerable people in general and women in particular.

Putting human rights first favours the development of a culture of peace – a culture based on freedom, justice, democracy, human rights, tolerance and solidarity – where violence is rejected and destructive conflicts are prevented. The fundamental causes of conflict are dealt with via dialogue and negotiation. Cultural diversity and ideological pluralism are welcome at all levels of society. In situations of armed conflict Diakonia puts a special focus on the situation of women, through emphasising the importance of the participation of women in all efforts to maintain or bring about peace and security, and the importance of increasing the role of women in all decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution.

After ten years the white chief of police that murdered eleven of her friends came on a visit to the hut. He received – a hug. “One has to be able to forgive”, says 60 year old Idah Hadebe and limps heavily on her hip that a bullet wounded. The massacre in Trust Feed happened during the time of apartheid in South Africa. Photo: Robban Andersson.
In situations of armed conflict Diakonia puts a special focus on the situation of women, through emphasising the importance of the participation of women in all efforts to maintain or bring about peace and security, and the importance of increasing the role of women in all decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution.
For whom, with whom and towards whom does Diakonia work?
IN ITS MISSION TO PARTICIPATE in changing the world, Diakonia’s work relates to a series of different actors. In order to clarify and conceptualise the various aspects of our work, these actors are divided into three groups.

Rights holders
Diakonia exists and works for people who are denied their human rights. It is fundamental to us that vulnerable people are not simply victims or survivors who have endured injustices, violence and discrimination – above all, they are individuals stripped of their human rights. This is why we talk of “rights holders”. Women make up a majority of those who are poor, oppressed and exposed to various forms of violence. As rights holders they are therefore a priority in Diakonia’s work.

Partner organisations
Diakonia develops partnerships with likeminded organisations within civil society in various parts of the world and at different levels of society. Likeminded organisations are organisations sharing an understanding similar to Diakonia’s of the basic causes of poverty in the world. Diakonia cooperates with different kinds of partner organisations in different ways:

- With grass roots organisations and social movements (frequently via NGOs) through financing, capacity building, exchanges of experience, networking, etc.
With churches and church-related organisations. Our founding churches and other denominations, their global networks and the ecumenical bodies to which they belong provide access to financing, capacity building, exchanges of experience, dialogue and advocacy work, etc.

With NGOs through financing, organisational capacity building, exchanges of experience, networking, joint campaigns, advocacy, etc.

With networks through membership, financing, exchanges of experience, joint campaigns, advocacy initiatives, etc.

The scope of partner organisations ranges from organisations in the developing countries where Diakonia works to organisations working in Sweden, in Europe and at the global level with multilateral organisations.

**Duty bearers**

Diakonia’s work is also oriented towards privileged people and those in power, who are encouraged to act for a just world and for sustainable development. Some actors have greater judicial or moral responsibility and greater opportunity than others to work for a world where all people can live a dignified life. This is why Diakonia uses the term “duty bearers”. Diakonia’s work includes interaction with:

- Politicians and public servants at local, regional and national level – both in developing countries and in Sweden.
- Decision-makers in and representatives of international and multilateral institutions and organisations.
- Journalists (newspapers, internet, radio and TV).
- The general public in wealthy countries, Sweden in particular.
What characterises Diakonia as an organisation?

Diakonia’s work can be roughly divided into three different elements:

- Cooperation with our partner organisations, and support for their long-term work on change.
- Popular education, mobilisation and advocacy in Sweden and internationally.
- Humanitarian emergency response together with partner organisations on site.

Diakonia wishes to work as a catalyst and a link in processes around the world where people together pursue long-term goals to improve and change the world. Some of the things that characterise Diakonia as an organisation are:

Firmly anchored in a tradition of creating change

Diakonia is part of a long Swedish free-church tradition of changing society. When the free churches that founded Diakonia and other popular movements came into being, they started extensive popular educational and cultural programmes giving considerable scope to democracy issues and social change. It is no exaggeration to say that democracy gained its strong basis in Sweden through the widespread popular education work of social movements. We bring this tradition of popular movements and popular education with us in our development work globally.
Diakonia as part of the Christian church
Diakonia's work is based on Christian values and a holistic understanding of mission. Diakonia is part of the churches' mission in the world. Diakonia works with the social aspect of the churches' task and cooperates with people from many different religions or beliefs. Together we are people changing the world.

No projects of its own in developing countries
The work of Diakonia is not about charity, but rather concerns changing structures that are at the roots of poverty. It is our principle not to conduct our own projects in developing countries. This is a core part of our ambition to contribute to real sustainable development. It is local organisations and networks that have the opportunity to make change and that remain in place when, at a suitable time, Diakonia concludes its development work in an area. Our partners have a far superior cultural understanding of the context, something that is decisive for the design of a project. They are frequently also more specialised, giving them greater expert knowledge. Through a mutual learning process, both Diakonia and our partner organisations can develop and improve our work together.

Consistent theme: qualitative participation
Poverty deprives people of the chance to determine and shape their own lives. From the rights perspective that Diakonia works with, we consider that truly just and sustainable development is only possible if the rights holders themselves have power over their own future. Thus, the active and qualitative participation of rights holders is a consistent theme in all projects supported by Diakonia. Marginalised groups should also have the opportunity to take part in or be represented in
processes where public decisions are taken. Therefore, we carry out considerable work to enable poor people – women in particular – to organise and create qualitative participation in decision-making processes that are important for their own development.

Qualitative participation is also a guiding principle within Diakonia. We seek as far as possible to involve our partners in the planning and monitoring of our work in order to develop a common ownership and through this improve the quality of the work. We also consider it crucially important that our popular education work is linked to our campaigns and advocacy work as the members of our founder organisations are the source of Diakonia’s legitimacy and strength in our advocacy work in Sweden and internationally.

Close to actual processes

In order to have a close and active partnership with our partner organisations, and also to have a continuous and up-to-date understanding of political developments, most of Diakonia’s employees are to be found in the same regions as our partners. The majority of our employees are not Swedish but rather personnel employed locally. A decentralised organisation with regional and national offices makes true partnership in close dialogue with our partner organisations possible. Regional personnel spend much of their time visiting our partners, both in their offices and by following activities in the field. In a corresponding manner, Diakonia also wishes for close proximity to and active participation in processes involving our founding churches, like-minded organisations, the media and decision-makers in Sweden.

Various financial backers

The financial basis for Diakonia’s work is the fundraising that takes place in congregations and money donated by private individuals. Their involvement not only provides us with funds but also with
credibility and legitimacy in our work. Hence the continuous development of our fundraising efforts. An important part of this work is the recruitment of Change Sponsors (regular donors). The Swedish Fundraising Council (SFI) has accorded Diakonia a so-called 90 bank account. This means that funds raised are checked to ensure they reach their intended destination without undue administration and fundraising costs. Funds collected enable Diakonia to apply for further financing from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Swedish embassies and the European Union, which make up the majority of our financing.

Humanitarian efforts following disasters

Since Diakonia focuses on long-term development, it could be said that all its work is preventative work against disasters. However, situations arise where human suffering is so great that it is essential for Diakonia and its partners to carry out disaster relief efforts. Diakonia only acts in disaster situations where well-established partner organisations are already in place. In some cases we also channel support to the efforts of sister churches to our founders or to Christian disaster relief organisations in areas where we do not have our own partner organisations. Relief efforts might include providing the basics for human survival or the rapid provision of resources to protect people exposed to threats, torture or other acts of cruelty. Efforts may also be directed towards people suffering in a protracted disaster situation and in such cases efforts focus partly on supplying help to survivors and partly on creating as rapid a return to normal life as possible. Gender and conflict analyses and environmental impact assessments are of crucial importance, not least where efforts involve reconstruction or where people are forced to live in refugee camps.

Meera Lebbe Seinapumma in Sri Lanka is 63 years old. She managed to save herself from the tsunami in December of 2004 by tying herself and two grand children in a palm tree with the help of her sari.

Photo: Markus Marcetic/Moment.
From the rights perspective that Diakonia works with, we consider that truly just and sustainable development is only possible if the rights holders themselves have power over their own future.
Diakonia

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