Democracy and human rights are essential for providing people living in poverty and under oppression with power, voice and choice to improve their living conditions. Sida’s support to the thematic area of democracy and human rights amounted to SEK 5.3 billion in 2015. This makes democracy and human rights Sida’s largest thematic area, equivalent to approximately 30% of Sida’s total disbursement 2015.

MAIN AREAS OF SUPPORT
Democracy and human rights are objectives in their own right in Swedish development cooperation. All Swedish development cooperation shall assume and be permeated by a rights perspective and poor people’s perspective on development. Support to democracy and human rights plays a fundamental role in combatting oppression, building democracies and reducing poverty in all its dimensions. The work is guided by the principles that human rights are universal, interdependent and indivisible.

The Agenda 2030 declaration is strong in expressing respect for human rights (primarily in § 8), and all Sustainable Development Goals relate to a number of human rights. Democracy on the other hand is only mentioned in § 9 of the declaration, and not in the Goals themselves. Goal 16 is ambitious and brings together many different sections of the aid community – but not explicitly democracy. Goal 16 has a broad agenda and the rationale is not only the promotion of peaceful societies. Targets especially relevant to the work of Sida within the thematic area of democracy and human rights are:

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Goal 10 targets promoting social, economic and political inclusion, reducing inequalities in opportunities and outcomes and facilitating migration. Special focus on combatting inequalities is highlighted in Goal 10.2 and 10.3:  
10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

The rights of persons with disabilities are highlighted under Goal 4.5 and 8.5. The right of the child is visible under a number of Goals such as Goal 3, 4, 5 and especially;

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

The focus of Sida’s work within the area of democracy and human rights is reflected in the volume of the support. Democratic participation and civil society is the largest subarea (SEK 2 billion or 38% of disbursements within the area of democracy and human rights), and human rights the second largest (SEK 1.4 billion or 26%). In terms of regional distribution, most funds are allocated for development cooperation with countries in Africa (35%) and Asia (19%). Support to global initiatives, for example international NGOs and global UN-programs, constitutes 25% of the total support within the thematic area.

THE GLOBAL GOALS
The Global Goals for Sustainable Development include everyone – and we can all contribute. The goals are interdependent and therefore indivisible. Sida’s main contribution is to implement development cooperation, thereby reducing poverty and saving lives. Together we can build a better future where no one is left behind.
DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD
From a global perspective, respect for human rights and democracy has made great advances over the last 25 years. However, serious threats and violations against civil and political rights, in particular freedom of expression, assembly and association, occur in 96 countries – including Russia and China – which means that six out of seven individuals live in countries where their freedoms are violated.

The space for exercising one’s civil and political rights is shrinking for civil society actors, journalists, environmental and human rights defenders (women are especially targeted) as well as for anti-corruption activists. Sida’s partners in many regions continue to face oppression from different actors in the form of violence, threats and increased regulations (related to registration, financing, advocacy etc.) of civil society organisations, media actors as well as increased control of internet access and freedom.

Civil society actors work hard to strengthen their capacity to adapt to these challenges, but the situation has continuously worsened over the last years in an increasing number of countries. Despite this negative trend regarding democracy, in many countries where Sweden is engaged in development cooperation, there are positive results at program and project levels through Sida’s partners’ ability to act flexible and adjust to changing political landscapes and complex, unpredictable developments.

SWEDISH SUPPORT
Sida’s democracy and human rights portfolio covers many sub-areas, as reflected in Tables 1 and 2. Support to civil society and democratisation actors is an integral part of Sida’s work against oppression and for human rights and democratic governance. Examples of results from 2015 include:

- A support to civil society in Mozambique has, through better legislation, increased gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights as well as reduced incidence of violence against women.
- Global support has contributed to important improvements within freedom of expression through incorporation of international norms in national legislation and institutional practices – and ensuring that human rights applies online as well as offline.

Corruption constitutes a concrete barrier to escaping poverty and oppression. Research shows that the problem is more extensive and serious, and its consequences more far-reaching, than has previously been known. Where corruption is widespread, virtually all sectors and functions of society are affected. Corruption undermines the rule of law and reduces trust in and legitimacy of governance and public institutions.

Sida’s support to anti-corruption organisations and institutions amounted to SEK 63 million in 2015. However, this is only a small portion of Sida’s support to combating corruption in our partner countries. Other contributions include those to improved public financial management (SEK 228 million), public sector policy and administrative management (SEK 196 million), media support and access to information (SEK 250 million).