



**Speech by Lena Hjelm-Wallén, Chair, International IDEA
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Dears hosts,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's presentations and discussions have demonstrated that the "Democracy and Development" nexus has been, and continues to be, debated both in academic circles and in the international community. There is, however, a broad understanding that the linkages are multiple and very relevant, both for those who work in the field of democracy building and those who are involved in development policies.

- Development is increasingly understood as a general improvement of the "quality of life" for the majority of the population and as such, it includes GDP growth, but also the effective fulfillment of human rights, including civic and political rights.
- Democracy on the other hand, not only a value to be pursued for its own sake, but also an integrated tool. It is a system of governance expected to deliver a better quality of life.

Let me admit that when I heard that a new theme in the development cooperation debate is "Democracy and Development" I was a bit puzzled. I asked if this really is something that has to be discussed. To me, development and democracy is part and parcel of each other. Perhaps a naïve idea from a long life in Parliament and Government, but also an experience from the field of development cooperation.

Since long ago we know that development – in order to be sustainable – needs dedicated people who take the responsibility for projects and achievements, and especially when the outside financing and engagement is over. To be very practical, I just want to highlight "maintenance". The water pump in the village, the road, the collective latrine – all need to be maintained by someone. People in the

village must shoulder responsibility collectively. Someone has to be entrusted to ensure continued functioning of this common investment.

In some places, there are no structures for this. In other places, there are traditional structures, even if they cannot always be called democratic. This is the opportunity to take the first basic steps in building democracy at the village level. The need for a collective responsibility must be reflected in a council, a shura, a working group or whatever it is called. This body should be elected in a democratic way, make decisions and be accountable for its activities. For most donor agencies or NGOs this has been a normal way of attaching democracy to development at the local level and to ensure that development has a better chance to be sustainable.

I think that we too often start the discussion about democratic structures from above. The first basic steps at the ground level are often neglected. My firm belief is that the local level is underestimated: This is where people get direct experience of the meaning of democracy. And it is also at the local level that the struggle for involvement of women in decision making must start.

This is not to say that the nexus “Democracy and Development” should not be discussed. On the contrary - it is very important, not least to secure that this concept continue to be at the front line of development cooperation policies and theories. The ongoing debate on the importance of participation and ownership in the design and implementation of development programmes is a reflection of this new awareness, as is demands for governance reforms.

One proof of this is that good governance has been included in the Millennium Development Goals and that the international community includes democratic governance as an important criterion for aid allocation.

So for development to stay sustainable: participation, ownership, responsibility at all levels, from the village to the state, are needed and necessary qualities, all attributed to democracy. And for sustainability to be long-term, both development and democracy must be homegrown.

Let us, for the future, when the tendencies in development policies come and go, remember this as the basic strategy!

This is even more important to stress when we know that it is very difficult to measure in quantitative terms the concrete "impact" of democracy on development.

However, the thesis that authoritarian rule may be better for development is definitely losing strength, not least because development itself is no longer seen as something just reflected in economic growth.

The case of China is frequently cited as a disturbing exception to the rule. But, please remember the way in which China's case is being presented. It is debatable whether the remarkable growth of the Chinese economy should be attributed to authoritarian rule or, rather, to other features, such as the growing pool of skilled human resources and the equally huge domestic market. Furthermore, is China more or less authoritarian today than it was in Mao's time?

China's political stage is still closed to multi-party elections, but the margins of free economic initiative have definitely expanded and China is certainly a more open country today than it was thirty years ago. This is not to say that China is on the verge of becoming democratic – China is still far from that; the point is just that one should be very careful in identifying causal relations in such complex developments. That is also to say that the development/democracy nexus in China will be of greatest interest to follow and should be closely scrutinized in the future.

I hope that even in China we will be able to see that development will have a positive influence on democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, and a growing understanding also in China that development needs democracy in order to be sustainable.

Let me now turn to the question about the capacity of a democratic regime to make a better life possible for its citizens:

I am sorry to say that there are ample evidences of failure of democratically elected governments to deliver on economic issues and basic services.

For example, in Latin America, also democratic countries show large income distribution disparities. This affects seriously the credibility of democratic institutions, including parliaments and political parties.

Even if expressing an opinion about this is close to internal politics in these countries, I want to argue that it must be more debated in the future as being an obstacle for democracy building.

Rule of law and respect for human rights are fundamental elements in a democracy. They constitute core elements in the development of a better quality of life, especially for marginalized people.

Please note that even in democracies, millions of women are still expecting improvements of their daily life, respect for their human rights and equal participation in political life.

So, a lesson for the future is: Democracies that do not deliver a better quality of life to poor people, and don't even show efforts in that direction, will in the long run damage all democratization efforts.

Unfortunately, I have to add that when governments in the West – the US as well as in the EU – decide not to accept the outcome of democratic elections, strong obstacles are also created to the struggle for democracy worldwide.

I am happy that the importance of political parties has been emphasized today. Political parties are necessary in a democratic system, but face big problems all over the world. It is obvious that they lack the trust of the people. This is a challenge in the established democracies in Europe, but is of course even more complicated in societies where a party system is relatively new and the development agencies don't always behave in a way that is supportive to political parties. Competition between NGO's and political parties and the unintended effects of the behavior of international donors are limiting the political space.

I wish to repeat what Vidar Helgesen said earlier: Development agencies place a strong focus on executives and on civil society organizations. Of course the role of such actors is important. But an excessive emphasis on them can undermine the functions of other actors in the political system, like Parliaments and political parties.

There is a growing concern among political parties in many developing countries regarding this. They argue that national development objectives, important as they are, do not constitute issues that can differentiate their political platforms from those of their contenders.

The political space is limited by outside actors such as international donors, their pressures, processes, and even conditionalities.

And often there is a perception that the recipients of development assistance are more accountable towards the donors than towards elected representatives in their parliaments and political parties.

This situation may have several adverse consequences:

First, national political actors (parliaments and political parties in the first place) lose a key opportunity to strengthen their role and their credibility as representatives of the citizens by shying away from debating development issues and priorities.

Second, development issues, by being absent (or insufficiently present) in the political debate, run the risk of becoming out of tune with key expectations of a broad range of national stakeholders.

By the same token, political parties may lose motivation to acquire the necessary knowledge and capacity to aggregate important demands of their constituencies and express themselves through coherent economic and social programs.

Let us be aware of these consequences. The donors should avoid measures that hamper a normal political life which must function in a democratic society.

Several development cooperation agencies have shifted or are shifting towards stronger focus on Parliaments and political parties as key institutions that should be involved and supported in the reconstruction and development of their country. EU countries - such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, the UK and Germany - are adopting this focus in terms of their policy making. This must also influence the wider development agendas of the World Bank and the harmonization agendas of the OECD.

It is also obvious that the EU should and could do much more.

The EU should use its own experience from the enlargement process, to enrich its development assistance and its support to democratization. The EU has experienced the positive interactions between democracy and development.

The EU can and must use its “soft” power, not only in its development cooperation, but also use its role as an important political actor on the international stage, for example in the UN and in the Bretton Woods institutions.

This is even more important as the American way of dealing with issues of democracy is highly questioned. Iraq and Afghanistan are not good examples of how to work with these sensitive issues, to put it diplomatically.

Thank you to SID and the other partners who have organized these series of seminars on democracy and development as well as today's conference. Also a great thanks to the very dedicated Chairperson, Jos van Gennip.

Now it is up to actors for democracy, like us here today, to ensure that the Democracy-Development nexus is translated into policies and actions by the international community. The landscape of democracy building is complex for all. Let us keep in mind that the ultimate purpose is to allow women and men at all levels, civil society and political parties to be real democratic actors in their own societies.

Thank you.

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