

# TURKEY CASE STUDY: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH–SOUTH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO TURKEY'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Over the past decade the Government of Turkey has significantly increased its international assistance, alongside an expanding geopolitical role in the world. According to statistics collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Turkey's Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2012 reached US\$2.5 billion, up from US\$600 million in 2005, a four-fold expansion in a mere seven years. The government has committed to reach US\$5 billion by 2015 and US\$10 billion by 2020.<sup>2</sup> While remaining a non-DAC donor, achieving the 2015 target would rank Turkey the ninth largest donor among the DAC donors, just behind Canada, and the 2020 target would bring this ranking up to sixth position.

As its aid resources grew, Turkey developed a global outlook for its aid policies and programmes. Since the early 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy has initiated multiple regional connections and extended its interests, starting with the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East. A major expansion into Africa can be traced back to a visit by the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to Ethiopia and South Africa in 2005. Turkey now has observer status at the African Union and has opened 15 new embassies across the continent. Turkey's programmes have also been growing in Central Asia, with significant attention to Afghanistan.



The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) now has a total of 33 coordination offices in the Balkans, Middle East, Africa and South and Central Asia, and has development cooperation programmes or projects in over 100 countries.

In 2010, Turkey's development assistance projects were distributed along the following geographic lines: 36 percent of all its projects were in Central Asia and the Caucasus, 33 percent in Europe, 23 percent in the Middle East and 9 percent in African countries.<sup>3</sup> The large increase in ODA from US\$1.3 billion in 2011 to US\$2.5 billion in 2012 reflects Turkey's humanitarian response to the urgent needs of Syrian refugees, many of them living temporarily in its border regions. The top 10 countries supported in 2011 were: Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Palestine.

Working directly under the Office of the Prime Minister, TIKA implements Turkey's development cooperation policy and coordinates its assistance programmes on the ground. TIKA was established in 1992, focusing primarily at that time on the Balkans and the Caucasus, but today it manages Turkey's global aid reach through 35 in-country programming offices (2012).

Turkey's development cooperation remains highly decentralized, with multiple government agencies and ministries involved. In 2011 TIKA directly allocated and managed only US\$150 million out of an ODA budget of US\$1.2 billion. Other government bodies involved include the Disaster and Emergency Situation Management Agency, the Housing Development Administration, the Turkish Armed Forces General Staff, the Turkish Sugar Factories, the Turkish National Policy Directorate, the Undersecretary of the Treasury, and the Ministry of Education. The Disaster and Emergency Situation Management Agency implements the largest share of Turkey's ODA. It is mandated not only

to allocate government funds but also to collect money from the Turkish public through campaigns.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey's ODA is organized around several operational principles:

- supporting sustainable social and economic development in partner countries;
- addressing global issues, including alignment with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- contributing to governance structures compatible with poverty reduction, human security, equality and participatory development;
- aligning with the development priorities of partner countries;
- cooperating and coordinating with the donor community for synergies; and
- adhering to common principles of aid effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Sector priorities include education and health, social infrastructure, water and sanitation, emergency humanitarian assistance, and administrative and civil infrastructure.

As described in more detail below, TIKA is currently coordinating a process to update its development cooperation policies to guide future programming. This process has included several workshops in early 2013 with both the private sector and with selected civil society organizations (CSOs) that partner with TIKA.

ODA has become an integral part of Turkey's proactive foreign policy. ODA allocations are also strategically aligned with Turkey's broader economic and political interests.

Expansion into Africa, for example, has been accompanied by a significant increase in Turkish trade and investment with both North and sub-Saharan Africa since the early 2000s. As a global actor, Turkey was successful in reaching out to African countries for support for its successful bid to fill a non-permanent position on the UN Security Council. Turkey is cautious in its use of its 'soft power' resulting from these relationships. In its policies towards Darfur, for example, while not ignoring the humanitarian dimensions of the crisis, Turkey's policy in the Sudan is one of "passive, quiet diplomacy and constructive engagement, supported by its developing economic and political ties with the Sudan."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, observers have acknowledged that Turkey has played an important diplomatic and mediating role through its presence in Somalia, where many other donors have failed over two decades. Turkey's role in Somalia is based on historical connections, as well as shared Islamic values and a lack of local proxies.<sup>7</sup>

The government has also reached out to collaborate with select Turkish CSOs in implementing its ODA programmes. Situating the move into Africa, it has been suggested, "Turkey's Africa policy is an arena in which, probably for the first time, the interests of CSOs, business sectors, and the state have largely converged."<sup>8</sup>

## 2. TURKISH CSOs AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Turkey has had a vibrant, diverse and active civil society working in many areas of social development. The Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV) reports that more than 93,000 associations are currently registered in Turkey, alongside 4600 active foundations.<sup>9</sup> A growth in the numbers and strength of CSOs has been the consequence of a series of reforms in 2003 that included a new Associations Law in 2004 governing civil society.

Turkey has a long history of private aid and philanthropic charities, including many rights-based NGOs, professional associations, community-based associations and faith-based organizations, which form a highly diverse civil society. CSOs date back to the Ottoman era, while the definition, role, responsibilities, values, structures and impact of civil society in Turkish society have been going through constant change. The space for civil society participation and its role has been shrinking and expanding over many years. Currently, the importance of the civil society is increasing for the society, the governance institutions and the private sector alike, and the legal environment regulating civil society is changing.

The relationship between governments and CSOs is a critical issue affecting the development of civil society. The new Association Law in Turkey had a positive impact in improving the relationship between the Government of Turkey and CSOs there. However, concerns exist regarding a gap between the law protecting the rights of civil society and an equal and even-handed implementation of this law. Many CSOs consider excessive control and interference by the government as creating a fear of sanctions, affecting their activities. TUSEV, in an annual 'Civil Society Monitoring Report', points out that the absence of an explicit definition of 'CSO' in the Turkish legislation "causes major problems and confusions in practice."<sup>10</sup>

Turkey's civil society sector is facing other limitations beyond the legal environment. CSOs face challenges in coordination, governance and technical knowledge in some areas, especially poverty reduction and advocacy skills. Many have insufficient resources to effectively carry out their mandate.

On the other hand, there have been attempts by civil society to increase coordination and collaboration between CSOs. Networks and platforms established by women's organizations, human rights organizations and environmental organizations are testimony to these efforts.

There has also been some communication and common action among organizations focusing on humanitarian aid, motivated by a shared agenda. However, communication and collaboration between and within civil society sectors and subsectors, and across type of organizations (rights-based, faith-based, geographic-focused, humanitarian, development etc.) remains an important issue and challenge. Platforms that unite CSOs around common agendas and issues are common in many aid-providing and aid-recipient countries. But in Turkey, the space for developing large civil society networks and/or umbrella organizations is still to be filled. Nevertheless, there is some interest in exploring the possibilities of a common platform, at least among some Turkish CSOs, as well as further developing contacts with their international counterparts. Success will depend on building capacities within civil society for dialogue, emphasizing values such as trust, tolerance, democratic governance, investing in collaboration and coordination. Creating opportunities for exchange of information, addressing common challenges and increasing interaction within the sector may identify common ground among organizations with different mandates.<sup>11</sup>

Transparency is a key element for making progress in CSO relations and with the government. At this stage, there is little publicly available information on how the Turkish government regulates non-state actors and holds them accountable for their actions, particularly with respect to CSO financial audits and official reports on activities.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these limitations, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) reports that conditions for civil society in Turkey have improved overall in the past decade. CSOs are no longer required to have prior authorization to receive foreign funding, partnerships or activities (although this funding must be reported when it is received). Associations have the right to form coalitions and platforms to pursue common objectives. CSOs no longer have to inform and invite a

government official to their annual general assemblies. CSOs are allowed to open representative offices in other countries, an essential enabling ingredient for them to initiate development cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

Turkish CSOs have been involved in international development cooperation at least since the early 1990s in parallel with the Turkish government assistance for Bosnia and Chechnya, working with victims of war.<sup>14</sup> An estimate from 2007 puts the level of **private** donations for Turkish development cooperation at US\$980 million (against US\$714 million in ODA for that year).<sup>15</sup> There are no recent estimates of private donations for development cooperation, but it is likely that these donations, particularly through faith-based organizations, have been sustained at least at these levels.<sup>16</sup>

International civil society solidarity has been primarily through large Turkish organizations such as IHH or the Humanitarian Relief Foundation, one of the largest Turkish humanitarian organizations, and the Deniz Feneri Association. Other examples of organizations involved in development cooperation include Doctors Worldwide, the Red Crescent, Yardimeli and Kimse Yok Mu (KYM).

In 2009 TIKA created a dedicated unit to manage its partnerships with Turkish CSOs.<sup>17</sup> It provides specialized support where needed but has limited financial and human resources to offer these partnerships. It must also work within the legal constraints of laws governing procurement as well as political imperatives. While many DAC development agencies (DFID, AusAID, Sida etc.) partner with a range of CSOs irrespective of the party in power, TIKA tends to relate almost exclusively to organizations close to the government.

Such an approach limits TIKA's ability to tap into the expertise, experience and energy that the broader civil society sector in Turkey can offer. Within partner countries, it reduces its ability to capture and engage with the full dynamics of civil society.

A key lesson for sustainable development interventions by external actors points to the importance of engaging with various sectors to understand the diverse needs and interests in a society, thereby contributing to social cohesion and equity. For example, Turkish rights-based CSOs could have much to offer in terms of programmes focusing on social protection, social equity, health and education in countries where TIKA is active, but these CSOs, with a few exceptions, either do not have sufficient resources or the inclination for major initiatives in development cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding some of the challenges, similar to other middle-income aid-providing countries, Turkish CSOs have extensive development expertise in areas such as children's education, women's literacy, domestic elimination of violence against women, agriculture and relief, rescue and reconstruction that could be more systematically and widely channelled towards Turkey's aid programmes abroad.

Turkish CSOs have been particularly active in the extension of aid programmes in Somalia. IHH has been working with a local partner in Somalia for more than 15 years and recently increased its activities alongside Turkish government agencies.<sup>19</sup> In addition to emergency assistance, IHH is constructing a large orphanage complex at a cost of US\$2.5 million. KYM has also been involved in substantial emergency aid, medical services and provision of tents.<sup>20</sup> The Turkish government took an active role in mediation, convening an intergovernmental Istanbul II International Conference on Somalia in June 2012. Significantly, the government also convened a gathering of Somali civil society a few days earlier in an effort to empower civil society in the peace process. Somali leaders praised Turkey's approach, in contrast to other donors, with Turkey's presence on the ground and its approach to humanitarian assistance delinked from issues of policy reform.<sup>21</sup>



This is an excellent example of cooperation between civil society and government. It is evident that there is interest and much potential among some Turkish CSOs in extending their work into development cooperation. TIKA, as coordinator and facilitator for Turkey's international assistance, has an important role in facilitating this international collaboration on the part of Turkish CSOs. If TIKA were to adopt a more inclusive strategic approach to the CSO community, it might better take advantage of the considerable experience and knowledge of a broad range of CSOs that could collaborate.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. CSO ENGAGEMENT WITH TIKA

As part of the reforms initiated in 2003, the government has acknowledged the importance of dialogue with civil society. But according to annual reviews by TUSEV, "this dialogue and cooperation is still in a nascent stage and the results of this process are yet to be observed." While consultation with civil society "remains the exception rather than the rule,"<sup>23</sup> there have been some recent important exceptions. In 2012 the government's Constitution Conciliation Committee organized public consultations with a broad range of stakeholders including CSOs. There has also been some civil society dialogue on a new Domestic Violence Act and related regulations with both the Turkish National Assembly and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.<sup>24</sup> But women's CSOs were also disappointed that the government had not included specific measures which were proposed during CSO workshops with the Ministry, in the Domestic Violence Act submitted to Parliament in March 2012.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, therefore, Turkish CSOs argue that "Turkey still lacks concrete policies, legal framework or institutional structures to foster dialogue, collaboration and cooperation with civil society organizations."<sup>26</sup> Since June 2012, TUSEV, the Civil Society Development Center and the YADA Foundation have been implementing a project, co-financed by the Turkish

government and the European Union, to strengthen civil society and dialogue between civil society and the public sector. This project will include a Code of Conduct, proposed by TUSEV, to create norms for civil society and dialogue with the public sector.<sup>27</sup> According to Turkish CSOs, government commitment to significantly improve its transparency will be an important precondition for effective dialogue.

In December 2012 an interministerial committee was created to prepare Turkey's development cooperation strategy, with TIKA serving as the secretariat. The strategy is intended to direct a significant expansion of resources for Turkey's development cooperation. Part of this committee's work will be to include a longer-term strategic approach to engage Turkish CSOs.

As part of the committee's preparatory process a series of workshops were held in April 2013 with the private sector and with civil society. The workshop was held with selected Turkish CSOs that had partnership relationships with TIKA. It was intended to help clarify expectations of both Turkish CSOs and the government, identify key challenges and ways to establish more effective partnerships, and contribute to the longer-term strategy.<sup>28</sup>

In the CSO workshop the government (TIKA) clarified its basic strategy of coordination. These efforts will create maximum synergies for Turkey's decentralized aid efforts with many government, private-sector and civil society bodies. With respect to civil society, TIKA said it currently works with approximately 70 CSOs in 40 countries.<sup>29</sup> It also acknowledged the importance for CSOs to retain their autonomy as development actors with their own programming priorities, while partnering with the government. Collaboration with CSOs will be seen within a holistic approach to development. This approach will strengthen Turkey's humanitarian efforts and deepen engagement with society as well as partner governments for sustainable development outcomes.

TIKA is looking for greater coordination with CSOs to move from an approach of short-term technical assistance to a longer-term orientation that sustainably strengthens local capacities. TIKA and government officials understand and respect the need for independent CSO space and the diversity of CSO contributions to development, but it seems that TIKA's development strategy would benefit from greater inclusiveness of other CSOs that are not currently included in this dialogue as TIKA partners.

CSO participants in the workshop, and in interviews, identified a number of challenges and opportunities for CSOs in deepening this strategic approach.<sup>30</sup>

- **Improved coordination** among the various government ministries involved in Turkey's development cooperation with other development actors was identified. TIKA could play an enhanced role in bringing the various development actors together on a regular basis. Parallel to this coordination, a CSO coordination mechanism to enable an advisory role for CSOs with TIKA and more effective CSO-government relations could be initiated by Turkey's CSO community.
- **Differentiation of CSOs in terms of capacities:** An enhanced TIKA strategy for engaging CSOs might differentiate between the areas of expertise, knowledge and experience each CSO can bring, as well as the different needs of smaller CSOs and the largest organizations and foundations. The former may benefit from enhanced training in project preparation and implementation. On the other hand, TIKA might consider new models for cooperation, recognizing the limitations of short-term project modalities in relation to achieving the sustainability of outcomes at the local level.

- **Accreditation:** The issue of accreditation was raised. Should accreditation be at the organizational level or in terms of individual projects? More discussion of the complexities of this issue is needed.
- **Improved transparency:** A number of CSOs outside this workshop raised the importance of greater overall transparency for Turkish development assistance and TIKAs relationships with CSOs.<sup>31</sup> The need for improved engagement and accountability practices with a wider range of Turkish CSOs beyond the current TIKAs partners was stressed.
- **Coordinating country information:** Improved knowledge of the partner-country context was seen as an important asset for CSOs. TIKAs had a role to play in bringing together country information, particularly for CSOs new to these countries. TIKAs might also play a role at the country level, identifying and synthesizing country needs. With wider access to this information, a diverse range of Turkish CSOs might have the capacities to respond.
- **Facilitating good practice:** TIKAs could consider creating a database of examples of best practices from the experience of CSOs, not only in development cooperation but also within Turkey itself. The importance of linking social, cultural and religious understanding with science, technology and technical expertise was highlighted in the workshop as a particularly valuable contribution. TIKAs might also consider developing a database at the country level where various Turkish stakeholders are involved to enable better country coordination.
- **Logistical support:** TIKAs could enable CSO operations through different levels of logistical support, from training, to facilitating visa requirements, to accreditation in certain countries. CSOs suggested that TIKAs coordinate a database of Turkish expertise

in various fields, particularly in the health sector and education, which CSOs could access for short-term volunteer needs. Greater clarity is also needed on national standards and legal regulations concerning volunteers, defining duties of employers and rights of volunteers.

The occasion of a new development cooperation strategy provides a unique opportunity to draw on the knowledge of Turkish CSOs, as do the lessons from other donors in strengthening cooperation with CSOs. There is already a solid foundation for engaging and cooperating with CSOs and supporting the development of civil society in Turkey's international assistance programmes.

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## INTERVIEWS

**Meryem Aslan**, Senior Advisor, Oxfam-Novib (Turkey), 22 April 2013

**Derya Kaya**, Women for Women's Human Rights, Turkey, 22 April 2013

# ENDNOTES

- 1 In developing this case study, the author appreciated the opportunity to participate in a workshop sponsored by UNDP-Turkey and TIKA in April 2013, focusing on the role of civil society as a partner in TIKA's development cooperation programmes. He also benefited from several in-depth interviews and comments from several CSO informants in Turkey. The views expressed in this case study are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the agreed outcomes of this workshop.
- 2 Bikmen, 2013: 1.
- 3 Daloglu, 2013. According to a mapping study prepared for UNDP, Turkey has a good and wide cooperation with international multilateral donors: ECO (fund for Reconstruction for Afghanistan); FAO (Central Asia Regional Office); IsDB (capacity development); UNDP Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development, Ankara; Partnership for Democratic Governance, UNDP: Staff support, ongoing programmes; UNIDO (food safety); Black Sea Trade & Dev. Bank (CPM et al., 2012: 66).
- 4 CPM et al., 2012: 61, 64.
- 5 CPM et al., 2012: 63.
- 6 Özkan, 2010: 100.
- 7 Aynte, 2012.
- 8 Özkan and Akugn, 2010: 526.
- 9 TUSEV, 2013.
- 10 TUSEV, 2011: 4.
- 11 Based on an interview by the author with the Senior Advisor of Oxfam-Novib in Istanbul, April 2013.
- 12 Morvaridi, 2013: 316.
- 13 ICNL, 2013.
- 14 Özkan and Akugn, 2010: 540–41.
- 15 Özkan and Akugn, 2010: 537.
- 16 The author observed that several Turkish CSOs in the April 2013 consultation with TIKA were explicit in their presentations that they were not seeking additional state resources for their programmes. They sought to strengthen ties with TIKA in other areas (see below).
- 17 TIKA official in UNDP–TIKA workshop with CSOs, 26 April 2013; author's notes.



- 18 One example of an exception is Turkish women's rights organizations, which have been collaborating with global networks such as the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Information provided by interview informants.
- 19 Its activities seem typical of both Turkish government agencies and other CSOs: "In addition to famine relief, IHH has provided free cataract eye surgery for about 10,000 people, rehabilitated fourteen mosques, drilled 370 water wells, distributed free Qurans, relocated 1500 Internally Displaced People and sponsored 3100 orphans. IHH, in partnership with the Qatari Red Crescent, also sent 10,000 tons of emergency aid and it planned to open in Mogadishu a primary, intermediate and secondary school for 1500 students in July 2012" (International Crisis Group, 2012: 4).
- 20 International Crisis Group, 2012: 4.
- 21 International Crisis Group, 2012: 6.
- 22 Based on interviews for this study.
- 23 TUSEV, 2013: 5.
- 24 TUSEV, 2013: 2, 3.
- 25 Based on interviews for this study.
- 26 TUSEV, 2013: 2.
- 27 TUSEV, 2013: 4–5.
- 28 This section is based on the unpublished concept note for the workshop: South-South Cooperation Project (UNDP), 'Concept Note: NGO Workshop for ODA Strategy, How can civil society be involved in development cooperation?', 26 April 2013. Approximately 30 Turkish CSOs and the author participated in the workshop, and the following paragraphs are based on the author's notes.
- 29 The TIKA official stated that there were more than 100 Turkish CSOs and foundations focusing on development cooperation and humanitarian assistance abroad.
- 30 The following ideas were among a large number of positive suggestions to improve partnerships between CSOs and the government made by CSOs in the workshop. TIKA welcomed these suggestions as advice to take into consideration with the interministerial committee but at this stage made no further commitments to implement.
- 31 Kaya, 2012.

