

Internal democracy

Internal democracy is a key aspect of organisational development. The Olof Palme International Center believes that for civil society organisations, political parties and associations to contribute to democratic societal development, they themselves must be democratically structured and must apply democratic methods. Not only is internal democracy an important principle in and of itself – and necessary in contributing to democratic development – but it is also a precondition for ensuring that an organisation is sustainable. Briefly put, internal democracy has to do with securing democratic decision-making within an organisation, an association or a political party.

It can be said the internal democracy has to do with the following principles:

- **Participation.** Ensuring that all members of the organisation can participate in decision-making processes on equal terms. Are there structures in place to enable this? How is the board elected? How is the agenda set?
- **Representation.** In order to be called legitimate, a democratic organisation must include the people it represents. For example, are women and other groups—such as minorities and young people—represented in executive positions? Are they given equal opportunities to put forward their views and opinions at meetings?
- **Transparency.** This has to do with openness with regard to members and others affected by the operation, such as the target group. For example, are the organisation’s regulations, annual reports and strategies readily available?
- **Demand for accountability.** Make sure that the people who make decisions are also held responsible in relation to those affected by the decisions. A democratic organisation must have mechanisms in place to ensure this. These could, for example, include having the board presenting the annual accounts for approval by the members at each annual meeting, and making sure there is a system in place for removing a board that has breached the organisation’s regulations.

Discuss:

- Who elects the board? How is the board elected?
- How is the executive committee elected?
- Who writes and/or approves the regulations?
- Are agendas distributed to everyone before meetings?
- Are the meetings democratic? I.e. are meeting officials used, does everyone have the opportunity to speak, are minutes taken, and so on?
- Are women and men equally represented?
- Is there a mechanism for ensuring representation of discriminated groups such

as women, minorities and young people in executive positions (e.g. reserved seats on the board)?

- How readily accessible is information about the organisation, such as the regulations, strategies and annual reports?