



Fighting Poverty Strategically?

Fighting Poverty Strategically? Lessons from Swedish Tanzanian Development Co-operation, 1997 – 2000.
David Booth et al
Sida Evaluation 00/22

Sweden has introduced Country Strategies in recent years to guide its development cooperation with partner countries. A strategy is based on in-depth analysis of the country's needs and development problems and on experiences of past cooperation.

Sweden establishes Country Strategies to guide its development cooperation. The figure illustrates the formal relationship between the steering documents and the Country Programme (comprised of the Country Plan, Annual Work Plans and Project/Programme documents). In addition to the guidance provided by the six official Swedish development objectives and Sida's Action Programmes on poverty, democracy, environment and gender, specific country and results analyses are prepared to guide the Strategy.

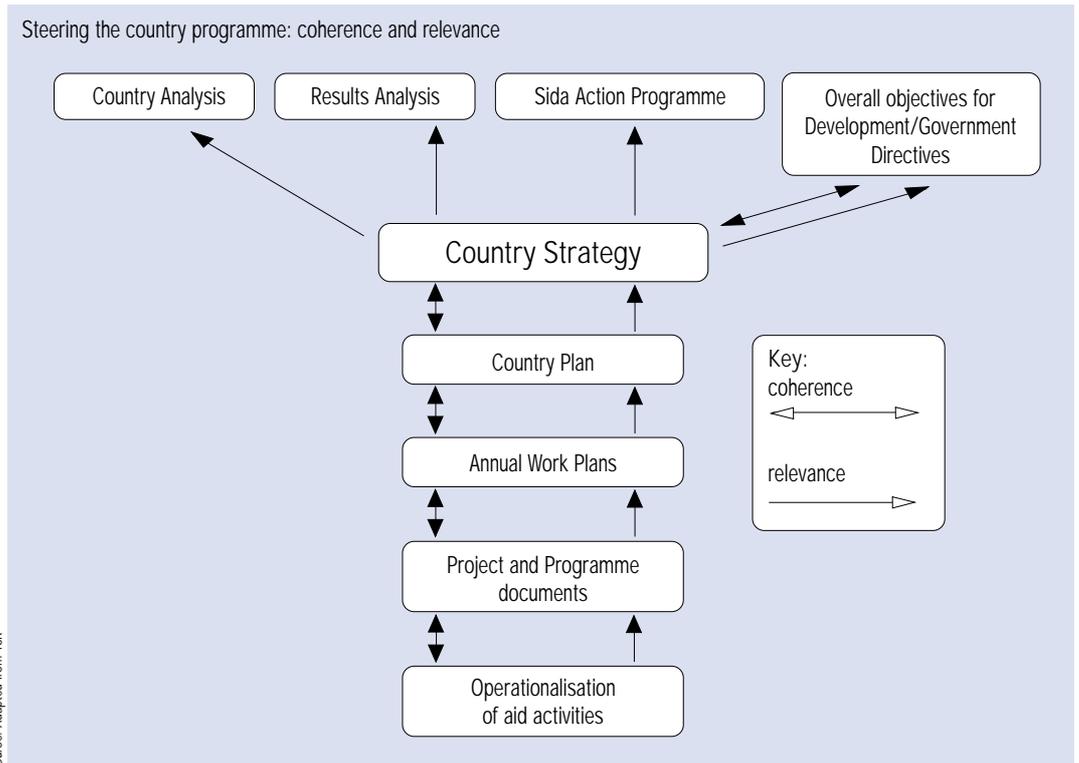
Background

There is today a new commitment to join efforts to substantially reduce international poverty. Studies show that international development cooperation to a large extent has failed to combat poverty effectively and strategically. The reasons for this are numerous, involving political and economic fundamentals. At the level of development cooperation the challenge is how to translate poverty reduction goals and objectives into relevant programmes and efficient interventions.

Two ways of tackling this challenge are discussed in a recent evaluation of Swedish cooperation with Tanzania. One is to place the design and selection of projects and programmes into a firmer strategic framework. In the mid-90's Sweden thus introduced Country Strategies to guide country-programme design. As instructed by, and in coop-

eration with, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida prepares these in dialogue with the partner country and other stakeholders. The strategies normally have a five-year span with revisions made every three years. The Country Strategy for Tanzania, covering the period 1997 – 2001, was the first to be adopted.

The other way is to engage in a process leading to fundamental changes in the institutional form of the aid relationship. In the case of Tanzania a big step in this direction was taken in 1996 when Tanzania and the Nordic countries reached a new partnership agreement under which Tanzania was to assume increased "ownership" of development programmes. This set a new framework for cooperation and also strongly influenced the preparation of the Country Strategy for Tanzania.



Source: Adapted from ToK

Successive Country Analyses found smallholder agriculture key to poverty reduction in Tanzania, yet it is a neglected issue in the Country Strategy.
Photo: Orgut



The evaluation is a case study on the effectiveness of Sida's recently developed Country Strategy process in steering Sida Country Programmes. It is also an assessment of the relevance of Swedish development cooperation with Tanzania during 1997-2000, with the operationalization of the "new partnership" principles adopted in 1996 as a major topic.

Sweden's development co-operation with Tanzania dates back to the mid 60's. The main program areas today are education, natural resource use and public finance and accountability.

The Evaluation

As a means of improving the effectiveness of Swedish aid in general, and the cooperation with Tanzania in particular, Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV) and the Department for Africa (AFRA) agreed on choosing Tanzania for the first evaluation of a Country Strategy and its operationalization. The evaluation may be seen as a case study of the effectiveness of Country Strategies in steering country programmes.

The scope of the evaluation was to assess the relationships between the various steering instruments (*Country Analysis, Results Analysis* and *Country Strategy*) and the country programme and its implementation (*see figure*). Two key concepts were used – *coherence* between directives, steering instruments and the programme, and programme *relevance* to the goal of reducing poverty. In addition, the evaluators were asked to assess the operationalization of the new partnership agreement between Sweden and Tanzania.

The evaluation was conducted in two parts. First, a Stockholm-based team led by SPM Consultants undertook documentary analysis and interviews to establish how well

the 1996 Country Strategy worked as an instrument in steering the country programme. Then a larger group, including six members of the Tanzanian research network TADREG, explored the operationalization of the Country Programme in Tanzania, using a combination of documents, interviews with stakeholders and field visits. The Overseas Development Institute, London, with David Booth as team leader, coordinated the exercise. The report carries the title "*Fighting Poverty Strategically? – Lessons from Swedish Tanzanian Development Co-operation 1997–2000*" (Sida Evaluation Report 00/22, Stockholm, 2001).

The evaluators' findings and recommendations concerning the strategy process, the country programme and the partnership agreement are presented below.

The Country Strategy Process

Analysing the coherence between the various steering documents in the Country Strategy Process the evaluation found an in-coherence between the Country Analysis and the Country Strategy, with the latter lacking the qualities of clarity, substantiation and monitorability that are essential in a steering document.

While the Country Analysis was found to be a generally good document expressing sound arguments concerning Tanzania's developmental problems and needs, the Strategy fails to further this analysis into a discussion about priorities for Swedish support. Even though certain important issues were overlooked in the Country Analysis the document presents excellent analyses on a number of key topics, including poverty, gender inequity and smallholder agriculture. Unfortunately it largely failed to lead the analysis into conclusions and implications for the Country Strategy.

The Strategy, in turn, fails to argue why certain analytical findings were not allowed to have an impact on the choice or direction of projects and programmes. In particular, the evaluation points at smallholder agriculture and gender inequality, considered of key importance for poverty reduction in the Country Analysis, but largely ignored by the Strategy.

The evaluators likewise found the influence of the Sida Action Programmes (on poverty, environment, gender and democracy & human rights) on the Country Strategy not to be particularly evident. The discussion on gender equality and environment is weak and poverty reduction is not singled out as an overarching objective.

On the other hand the evaluation found a clear influence of the Results Analysis on the Strategy. However, the authors question whether this should be seen as a point of strength, considering that the Results Analysis was found to be deficient in itself. Failing to assess programme effectiveness, impact, sustainability and lessons learned it did not constitute a strategic input to the Country Strategy.

In conclusion, the evaluation found the Country Strategy to have influenced but not *steered* the Country Programme. The evaluation still found the Strategy basically relevant to Swedish objectives and Tanzanian conditions in 1996 and the subsequent Country Programme to contain relevant programme areas. This lack of coherence, the evaluation suggests, can be explained by the fact that projects and programmes to a large extent predates the Strategy and that changes taking place during the period often depend on deci-

sions taken at sector, rather than at a strategic, level. Such decisions may be based on sound analyses but there is a risk that sectoral aid policy is driven by supply-side considerations, more than by identified, strategic needs.

To improve the Country Strategy process and to use it as a vehicle for building consensus within Sida and in relation to the Embassy, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the partner country, the evaluation recommends more uniform instructions for the preparation of Country Strategies. It also recommends adoption of a Logical Framework Approach for the Country Strategy process and a review of the Results Analysis process and content in order for it to provide the type of analytical information required for the strategy process.

Operationalization of the Country Programme

The report then analyses the coherence between the steering documents and the implementation of the Country Programme. This is done with respect to the programme's relevance to poverty reduction and set priorities as well as its coordination with other donors and the Tanzanian Government.

The major programme areas in Tanzania during the period in question were infrastructure (electricity and telecommunications), basic education, natural resources and public finances and accountability.

The evaluation found the programmes relevant *per se*, though various possible adjustments within each of the major areas are indicated. Relating to the previous discussion the authors suggest that the content of the Country Programme should be more deliberately derived from an analysis of the country situation and evidence of effectiveness in past projects and programmes.

Recognizing that the productivity of smallholder agriculture is a major challenge for the overarching goal of poverty reduction, the evaluators conclude that Sida would need very strong reasons for *not* engaging more broadly in this area in the future.

The evaluation questions whether the support given to electric power and telecommunications was sufficiently justified in poverty reduction terms. But a positive message is the

The Country Strategy for Tanzania, though poorly reflecting the country analysis on which it should be based, was, the report says, broadly relevant, but lacked qualities of clarity, a supportive base and monitorability, all essential in a steering instrument.

suggestion that Sida should build on the position of influence it has gained by remaining actively involved in policy work in these sectors.

Similarly, in the private and financial sectors supporting the move away from direct support for projects, enterprises and institutions in favour of increased involvement in policy discussions is commended.

In the education sector the major component of Swedish support is the production and distribution of books and teaching aids. The evaluators see the book project as highly relevant to poverty reduction but not sufficiently targeted to specifically reach the poor. The evaluation here discusses the “links in the chain” problem, i.e. the risks of project support in a weak institutional environment. Sweden is actively engaged in donor coordination and negotiations about a Sector Programme Support to education but the process can be said to have been donor driven and the Ministry too weak for a successful outcome. These institutional risk factors need to be taken more into account in project design, the evaluation suggests.

Cooperation in the public financial management area was found to be an encouraging programme. Sweden’s provision of flexible support to the national budget is here backed up by a set of Sida-funded projects designed to improve accountability in public administration.

Looking at the two Swedish-funded rural development programmes the authors discuss emphases and priorities. While acknowledging their benefits for poor people, the evaluators suggest further analysis of experiences, to the benefit of the new District Development Program around Lake Victoria, currently under preparation.

Cooperation and “Partnership”

The 1996 partnership agreement stressed Tanzanian “ownership of and responsibility for” Swedish-supported programmes and projects. The evaluation found uneven progress in implementing this new partnership agenda.

Significant progress has in recent years been made in the donor relationship with

Tanzania, particularly by restoring to Tanzanians the leadership of macro-economic and public expenditure management. Sweden has pushed for this change and also has an excellent record of accounting for its aid to the Government of Tanzania. The evaluation recommends Sida to influence other donors in the same direction and also to move towards channelling funds through Government rather than, as now, directly to programmes and projects. The current practice is partly responsible for the lack of local ownership in most government offices.

The evaluators still find it difficult to identify cases of Tanzania sitting in the “driving seat”. However this is not surprising, considering the fundamental relations between donor and recipient as well as the institutional problems of Tanzania. The evaluation recommends continued support for the implementation of the partnership principles and supports a situation where all major donors come together around a common strategy in close consultation with Tanzanian stakeholders under government leadership.

Concluding remarks

The most important general lesson from the evaluation is that development cooperation can become more effective and relevant by being more strategically based.

The evidence on implementation shows that quite a lot can be achieved even when there are significant flaws in the formal “steering” process. However, the 1996 Tanzania Strategy could have been more evidence-based and attentive to strategic choices and, if so, could have delivered a more relevant country programme than it did.

In the view of the evaluation team, a more genuinely strategic approach, based on evidence and explicit argument, from objectives to priority actions, is required. It should normally not be permitted for a Country Strategy to ignore a major theme of a Country Analysis. The Results Analyses, on the other hand, should be more analytical, focusing on areas with clear implications for the Strategy. Through the adoption of a Logical Framework Analysis as a component of the strategy process improvements can be achieved.

While Swedish development cooperation with Tanzania has been largely relevant to poverty reduction and other objectives, the 1996 Country Strategy could have been more evidence-based and attentive to strategic choices than it was.

Managing Information about Results

Access to timely and useful information about the results of development cooperation is one of the key requirements for cost-effective Sida performance. Without such access agency resources will be wasted when producing results analyses for the elaboration of country strategies, when providing information to the Swedish public and when administering individual projects and programmes.

This is the background to a formative study of Sida's routines and priorities for the management of results information, carried out by the agency's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV), and finalized in early 2001. The purpose of the study is to contribute to a cost-effective use of results information by and within Sida.

The study focuses on information generated by four bilateral programmes in the Education and Natural resources sectors in Tanzania during the period 1997-1999. Four observations made by the study are of particular importance:

- The way Sida collects and disseminates results information is far from cost-effective.
- Counterpart's progress reports on programme expenditure, activities and outputs are often not compliant with Sida's standards for such reporting.
- There is an overwhelming amount of information produced by an excess number of monitoring, evaluation and related initiatives.

- Most of the information gathered is paper-based and not optimally shared with different user-groups, such as Sida's Stockholm office.

In response to these observations, the study gives several recommendations about how to make Sida's collection and dissemination of results information more cost-effective and user-friendly. In particular the study recommends that Sida should:

- Introduce a simple format for the content and structure of counterpart quarterly and annual reports. The format proposed should be compliant with Sida's reporting standards, which would make such reports easier to understand and less time-consuming to produce.
- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation studies always – also in practice – take stock of already existing information about the evaluated programme and its results.
- Use the expected chain of causes and effects (or logframe) of the evaluated programme as a basis for guiding and focusing evaluation studies on particularly relevant and useful information.
- Investigate the technical requirements for electronic attachment of results-oriented documents to the agency's intranet (such as counterpart reports, monitoring and evaluation studies and a proposed annual results summary produced by individual programme officers).

The Management of Results Information at Sida –
Proposals for new routines and priorities in the information age
Göran Schill
Sida Studies in Evaluation 01/01

While the study's recommendations may be perceived to add burden to already time constrained staff, the administrative benefits, the study concluded, are likely to far outweigh the costs.

Sida's management information system has to be re-shaped in the next few years to meet increasing outside demand for a more transparent and productive "new bureaucracy".

The search for results information is very much an ad hoc affair, which lacks strategic priorities. The consequence is a whole jungle of information that is never used for learning and control.

Posttidning B

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