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**AIDING SCIENCE.**

**AN ANALYSIS OF SWEDISH RESEARCH AID POLICY 1973 - 2008**

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*Aiding Science. An analysis of Swedish research aid policy 1973 - 2008*

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## Introduction and background

Developing countries reliance on import of ready-made technology or research results will not suffice to satisfy basic needs. A pre-requisite for independent development strategies in this direction is a national capacity for research as well as for the development, evaluation and adaptation of technology. Massive resource transfers will only work if developing countries have absorption capacity. The lack of a minimum of national capacity in science and technology severely restricts the possibilities of developing countries to reach their economic and political goals.<sup>1</sup>

- *Sarec Annual Report 1977/1978*

Scientific research is considered a central driving force in the modern world and universities are considered important actors.<sup>2</sup> Apart from providing higher education and conducting research, universities are also expected to more directly stimulate national economic growth and development through cooperating with other public and private actors.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, different opinions regarding how universities affect a country's social and economic development,<sup>4</sup> and there are studies which suggest that universities often lack the capacity to live up to all of these demands.<sup>5</sup> Support to science as a form of foreign aid grew in the post-WWII period and the number of aid actors engaged in science for development increased considerably in the 1990's and 2000's.<sup>6</sup> It was against this background that I became curious about pioneer aid actors and their policies concerning research for development.

The UN started working with development research soon after its inception in 1945, and the first national development agencies to tackle the issue were the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada in 1970 and the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (Sarec) in 1975. Sweden had supported development research in different forms since the 1950's, but the formation of Sarec represented a shift in the view of how science could contribute to development. Sarec's task was to support development research and contribute to building research

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<sup>1</sup> Sarec (1979). Sarec's Second Year, Annual Report 1977/1978. pp25-26

<sup>2</sup> See for example Shapin, S. (2008). Science and the Modern World Handbook of Science and Technology Studies (3rd ed). E. J. H. e. a. (eds), The MIT Press.p433

<sup>3</sup> Developmental universities is one of the concepts that reflect these demands, entrepreneurial universities is another. See for example Brundenius, C., B.-Å. Lundvall, et al. (2009). The role of universities in innovation systems in developing countries: Developmental University Systems - Empirical, Analytical and Normative Perspectives. Handbook of Innovation Systems and Developing Countries – Building Domestic Capabilities in a Global Setting. B.-Å. Lundvall, K. J. Joseph and C. e. Chaminade, Edward Elgar Publishing. It should be noted that Developmental universities is not an entirely new concept, see for example Coleman, J. S. (1986). "The idea of the developmental university." *Minerva* 24(4): 476-494.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Mowery, D. C. and B. N. Sampat (2005). Universities in National Innovation Systems The Oxford handbook of innovation. J. Fagerberg, D. C. Mowery and R. R. e. Nelson, Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Göransson, B., R. Maharajh, et al. (2009). "Introduction: New challenges for universities beyond education and research." *Science and Public Policy* 36(2): 83–84. p83

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, E. and D. Holland (2003). "Social development as knowledge building: research as a sphere of policy influence." *Journal of International Development* 15(7): 911–924. p912, King, K. and S. McGrath (2004). Knowledge for Development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish and World Bank Aid. New York, Zed Books Ltd. p38. One of the reports said to have been most influential was the World Bank's Dahlman, C. and T. E. Vishwanath (1999). World Development Report 98/99: Knowledge for Development, The World Bank.

capacity<sup>7</sup> in low-income countries. As illustrated by the quote above, the focus shifted from *transfer* of knowledge and technology to the concept of *capacity building*, something which in aid terms required a greater focus on bilateral cooperation. Development-related research results alone were in this perspective not enough; it mattered how, where and by whom research was being undertaken.

The purpose of this report is to summarize my dissertation on the topic of Swedish research aid policy.<sup>8</sup> The dissertation investigated how Swedish official aid policy constructed the role of research for development in low-income countries between 1973 and 2008.<sup>9</sup> The overarching purpose of the study was to contribute to an understanding of how science has been conceived of as a tool for progress in the post-World War II period. Questions that I asked included: How was the role of research for development constructed? How are individual researchers and universities seen to contribute to development? How is the role of the aid actor portrayed? I sought to identify trends and patterns as a way to analyse the kind of futures that were imagined in the policy documents with respect to the role of science.

The report is structured as follows. I begin with a short summary of theory and methods to explain my analytical points of departure and way of working. I then provide a historical contextualization of the organization Sarec before delving into the more narrowly defined area of Sarec's policy development. The report ends with some reflections on the potential practical implications of the study.

## **Materials, methods and theoretical perspectives**

What have I done, why and how? Sarec annual reports as well as policy and methods documents were central to the study.<sup>10</sup> These are public documents that were explicitly aimed at informing various stakeholders and interested persons about what Sarec did, why and how. The annual reports were also published consistently, something which enabled relevant and interesting comparison over time. In addition to these documents, I analyzed evaluations, parliamentary records and a number of government Bills. Last but not least, I conducted interviews with former director generals.<sup>11</sup> My

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<sup>7</sup> Research capacity is made up of for example capable researchers, infrastructure, favorable research climate, research ethics and adequate funding. UNESCO (2006). Universities as Centres of Research and Knowledge Creation: An Endangered Species? Summary report from Colloquium on Research and Higher Education

<sup>8</sup> Brodén Gyberg, Veronica (2014), Aiding science - Swedish research aid policy 1973-2008. Linköping Studies in Arts and Science No.594, Linköping University. Since it is a summary, the level of detail is naturally restricted. The table of contents of the dissertation should provide guidance to finding fuller accounts of the different aspects I raise here.

<sup>9</sup>The support to development-related research activities also involved other Swedish state actors and organizations during different periods, focusing on the case of Sarec is warranted since it was by far the most central actor. The study ends 2008 given the fact that Sarec was radically reorganized that year along with the rest of Sida, and the material available after that date is not as consistent as it had been up until then.

<sup>10</sup> The SAREC Model: Institutional Cooperation and the Strengthening of National Research Capacity in Developing Countries (1992), Research Cooperation I – An Outline of Policy, Programmes and Practice & Research Cooperation II – Trends in Development and Research (1998/2000), The Ownership and Cultivation of Knowledge – The rationale for Swedish support to universities in developing countries (Berit Olsson, 1992), Sida's Policy for Capacity Development a Strategic Question in Development Cooperation (2000), Sida's Manual for Capacity Development (2005), Time for Rethinking - Capacity Development in a Changing Landscape of Development Cooperation (2006), Policy för forskning inom det Svenska utvecklingssamarbetet 2010-2014 och strategi för Sidans stöd till forskningssamarbete 2010-2014 (2009)

<sup>11</sup> All directors were interviewed, with the exception of Karl-Erik Knutsson (the first director) who passed away in 2002. More details about each of the informants can be found in chapter three of the dissertation but the interviewees were: Lars Anell, Bo

analyses were guided by both inductive processes of open coding and more deductive approaches steered by theoretically informed research questions.<sup>12</sup> More detailed discussion about the material and methodology can be found in chapter three of the dissertation.

I used discourse analysis inspired by Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough to analyze the material.<sup>13</sup> Discourses were in this context defined as historically situated practices (such as speech and written text) which contribute to the formation of the objects and the identities of subjects that they refer to.<sup>14</sup> A slightly more concrete use of the concept is “a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective which can be distinguished from others.”<sup>15</sup> Foucault was interested in power and knowledge, not least claims to truth through the use of *scientific* knowledge.<sup>16</sup> His analyses examine what the political uses of certain knowledge production can be for example, and show how it is possible to think in a certain way. One example is the idea of the university; this idea makes possible a certain mix of “things” in a university system. The institutions and practices of that particular time must sustain the discourse; otherwise it cannot “fulfill” that particular idea of the university.<sup>17</sup> Swedish official research aid policy affects and is affected by different actors, contexts and ideas. The documents (and the former directors) can in this context be conceptualized as *discursive agents* that in different ways contribute to the strengthening, maintenance or weakening of central objects in the discourses identified.<sup>18</sup>

While keeping in mind that there is room for change and resistance, I argue that Swedish research aid discourse (as constructed by texts such as annual reports, parliamentary proceedings, evaluations and former directors) is partly constitutive of how universities in low-income countries come to contribute to development. It is also constitutive of how they are perceived to do so by those who take part of the documents, regardless of whether these are critical or positive readers for example. The case can be framed as follows below, inspired by Fairclough.

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Bengtsson, Anders Wijkman, Johan Holmberg, Rolf Carlman, Berit Olsson, Tomas Kjellqvist and Anders Granlund. I also interviewed Björn Hettne (key informant), whom in addition to having been Knutsson's assistant in the 1970's also wrote the appendix on development theory to the SOU 1973:41 and a number of subsequent Sarec publications on development theory.

<sup>12</sup> Bergman, P., B. Berner, et al. (2005). Samhällsvetenskapens hantverk, Arkiv förlag. p140 inspired by 1972 Baldamus, W. (1972). The Role of Discoveries in Social Sciences. The Rules of the Game. T. Shanin. London, Tavistock Publications.

<sup>13</sup> I also used some ideas and concepts from the field of Science and Technology Studies, like boundary organization and sociotechnical imaginaries, but I will not go into these here as the discussion about discourses is enough to explain my general approach.

<sup>14</sup> Fairclough, N. (1993). Discourse and Social Change, Polity Press. p3, Dreyfus, H. L. and P. Rabinow (1983). Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (2nd ed), The University of Chicago Press, and Howarth, D. (2000). Discourse, Open University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Jørgensen, M. and L. Phillips (2002). Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method, Sage publications. p66-67

<sup>16</sup> Dreyfus, H. L. and P. Rabinow (1983). Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (2nd ed), The University of Chicago Press. p61 and Triantafillou, P. (2012). New Forms of Governing. A Foucauldian Inspired Analysis, Palgrave Mcmillan. Pp11-12

<sup>17</sup> Dreyfus, H. L. and P. Rabinow (1983). Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (2nd ed), The University of Chicago Press. p66

<sup>18</sup> Bäckstrand, K. and E. Lövbrand (2007). Modernization and Civic Environmentalism. The Social Construction of Climate Change: Power, Knowledge, Norms, Discourses. M. E. Pettenger, Ashgate Publishing. p125



My main aim has not been to *evaluate* the development of research aid discourse per se, but rather to *explore* and *critically analyze* it from different perspectives. This ambition is in line with the view of sociologist and development theorist Jan Nederveen Pieterse, who claims that discourse analysis lends itself well to *critical analysis*, not policy formulation. It is most appropriate for “critiquing hegemonic discourses and exposing its silences, omissions and double talk”, including “the scrutiny of development policy, official texts and development thinking.”<sup>19</sup> I cannot make *causal* claims as I have not studied the organization in depth nor the politics behind the scenes, but the study nonetheless constitutes useful background for discussions about current and future policy. The policy documents reflect aid actors’ intentions and presumably have an effect on the type of development efforts pursued in low-income countries so shedding light on historical policy trends can help to ensure that the paths aid actors contribute to are not too narrowly defined, “supply-driven” or colonialist for example.

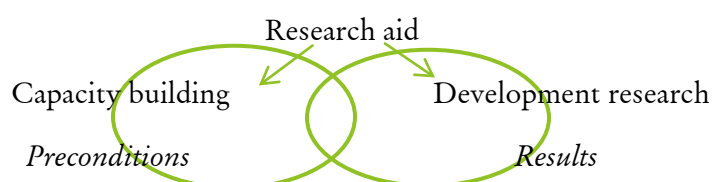
### **Producing results versus building capacity: research aid methods**

The study focused more on the *policy discourse* of the research aid actor than on the organization per se, yet a glimpse into what different research aid actors do is a relevant background to have in order to understand Sarec. The support from research aid actors may consist of activities such as split research training programs for low-income country students to attain MSc’s and PhD’s, the financing of infrastructure (such as labs and ICT), assistance with national and/or local education and research policies, support to research networks between low-income countries, and direct research project

<sup>19</sup> Nederveen-Pieterse, J. (2011). "Discourse analysis in international development studies." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 6(3): 237-240. p239 See also for example Nowotny, H. (2004). *Does History of Science Have Policy Implications? The Science Industry Nexus. History, Policy, Implications.* K. Grandin, N. Wormbs and S. Widmalm, Science History Publications/USA & The Nobel Foundation.

funding. Most of these activities occur with varying levels of collaboration with high-income country universities, regardless of whether the focus is on capacity building or development research.

One can distinguish between support to *development research* and support to *building research capacity*;<sup>20</sup> the two are related in many cases but have slightly different goals. Development research is research which has more or less direct relevance to the solving of problems facing low-income countries, but it is not necessarily only conducted there (such as research on agricultural or medical technologies conducted in international research organizations). However, when the goal is to contribute to the building of research *capacity* in low-income countries, the research process itself and its surrounding prerequisite conditions are the priority. The main goal might be to contribute to an increased number of doctoral graduates or to assist in research policy management. The specific *areas* of research involved and their development relevance are certainly not irrelevant, but of secondary importance.



The research aid strategies of different country agencies have many components in common, they can encompass for example: supporting specific development relevant research projects (in low-income countries, high income countries, or both; in bilateral cooperation); assisting with, or creating, training programs for researchers (carried out in high-income countries, low-income countries, or both); supporting the building of important infrastructure (such as information and communication technology, administration systems, or labs; and supporting the development of national, regional, and international research networks. Some actors place larger emphasis on for example training programmes or infrastructure, while others focus more on policy level efforts, and others do all of the above. Sometimes cooperation with other actors in industry and civil society are encouraged or demanded.

Sarec has aided research through three major programmes which in turn include several different forms of cooperation or support. They were: the *bilateral* programme (involving cooperation between universities in Sweden and universities in low-income countries), support to *Swedish development research* and support to *international research organizations*. While the two areas overlap in terms of their effects, bilateral support has been considered the main way through which to contribute to *capacity building* and *preconditions for research*, while the main aim of the other two programmes has been to support development relevant research *results*.

## Situating Sarec

The organizational history of Sarec can be summarized as follows. Between 1975 and 1995, the organization was a free-standing public agency, after which it became a *department* within Sida. In 2008, Swedish aid politics changed significantly and Sida was reorganized. Sarec ceased to exist in the form

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<sup>20</sup> The definition of research capacity includes everything from individual researcher's skills to information and communication technologies, laboratories, and national research policies.



that it had up until then, it changed names to the Secretariat for Research Cooperation and the majority of its staff was moved to other parts of Sida.<sup>21</sup>

Swedish research aid is placed in the middle of two political policy spheres, research and foreign aid, the former belonging to the ministry of education and research and the latter to the ministry of foreign affairs. The overarching goal of Swedish foreign aid has been to contribute to poverty reduction in low-income countries while the goals of research, somewhat simplified, have been to produce new knowledge and contribute to national development.<sup>22</sup> In other words, while research seems to have been relatively well-recognized as a tool in foreign aid policy,<sup>23</sup> development-relevance seems to be considered more like a desirable *side effect* in research policy.<sup>24</sup>

Internationalization has been a priority in research policy, but cooperation is primarily encouraged with middle and high-income countries.<sup>25</sup> The goal of Swedish *research aid* has been to support development-relevant research and contribute to building research capacity in low-income countries, and the research agendas pursued are to be based on low-income country priorities. The two policy areas are not always compatible; goals are quite different, and results are measured differently in the two fields. The fact that research cooperation with low-income countries is a relatively marginalized issue in research politics can be considered a challenge for the research aid actor.<sup>26</sup>

## The 1970's. Emancipatory ambitions

The annual reports of the first few years contain various answers to the question of what the links between research and development are.<sup>27</sup> The essence of the argument is the same, despite variations in

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<sup>21</sup> Another reorganization occurred in 2011. By then, the staff working with research had been reduced by 50%. Staff are now divided between a secretariat (research unit), the long-term program department (PROGSAM) and Swedish Embassies. Essentially the task remains the same, the budget remains around one billion crowns but the responsibilities for implementation are more spread out.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the discussion about growth and increased commercialization of research in (2008). Ett lyft för forskning och innovation. Regeringens proposition 2008/09:50. T. S. Government. pp1-2. This is also an interesting issue since the institutional setting for research is national, yet research itself has numerous international components and the results do not necessarily benefit the country in which the research is "housed." See for example Edqvist, O. (2009). Gränslös forskning, Nya Doxa. and Benner, M. (2008). Kunskapsnation i kris. Politik, pengar och makt i svensk forskning, Nya Doxa.

<sup>23</sup> Even though some evaluations show that there might be differences in opinion regarding exactly how this "tool" should be used.

<sup>24</sup> In the research bill from 2012 no significant changes can be noted in this area, research partnerships with middle-income/BRIC countries are still encouraged on a strategic basis.<sup>24</sup> Low-income countries are largely absent, except for a section of the bill where it is established that the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) takes over the responsibility for distributing the funds for Swedish development research and that applications will be judged primarily by scientific relevance.

<sup>25</sup> This seems to be the case in Canada as well, for example; cooperation with middle and high-income countries is encouraged but commitments above and beyond standard internationalization measures need to be made in order to increase cooperation with low-income countries. See Angeles, L. and P. Boothroyd (2003). "Canadian Universities and International Development: Learning from Experience." Canadian Journal of Development Studies 24(1): 9-26.

<sup>26</sup> Despite the PGU and references to cooperation with low-income countries in research-related government bills and increased attention to internationalization, Sarec's research council remains the heaviest funder of development research. See also Edqvist, O. (2009). Gränslös forskning, Nya Doxa.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller account of the four decades in focus here, the reader will have to consult the dissertation. The following account does not do justice to the complexity of the material nor the bigger political picture of relevance to the policy development. The state investigation report *Research for Development* (SOU1973:41 (1973). Forskning för utveckling. Betänkande av u-landsforskningsutredningen. Statens offentliga utredningar. Stockholm.) for example, laid the foundations for Sarec's policy

formulation and emphasis: in order for a country to develop autonomously, there is a need for local/national capacity that can identify and produce the knowledge most suited to that particular context and problem. Coupled with this argument is also a more or less explicit critique of low-income country dependence on external capacity (often from high-income countries), which implies that low-income countries cannot escape “underdevelopment” without developing their own capacity in science and technology. The domination of Western science and patterns of research is portrayed as a continuation of colonialism.<sup>28</sup> Despite the recognition of the value of *indigenous knowledge systems*, many quotes and illustrations in the reports could be seen as upholding high income countries as providers of the “right” kind of knowledge. The concept of indigenous knowledge systems does not return again in coming reports, and the discussion about the dominance of Western research is discussed in less explicit ways. Perhaps this is because the whole idea in a way would have undermined Sarec’s very existence.

Science and technology capacity are seen to be necessary for independent and context-relevant decision-making, which in turn is assumed to improve the possibility of the countries in question to reach their political and economic goals.<sup>29</sup> The annual reports contain clear ambitions to create modes of cooperation and support that are based on the prioritized needs as expressed by the low-income countries. The heterogeneity of low-income countries is often discussed; “... an awareness of the unique local conditions in each instance is crucial. It is important for Sarec to be able to “plug in” into many different systems.”<sup>30</sup>

The type of support offered by Sarec thus differed from country to country, though the general goals and principles remained the same. Sarec stated in its first annual report that “the fact that the needs of the third world countries govern the overall orientation of Sarec’s support gives Sarec a special position in relation to other research funding bodies.”<sup>31</sup> Another example that illustrates the centrality of *context* in Sarec’s reports is the discussion about the “situatedness” of researchers: “Science is what scientists do, trapped as they are by their background, interests and the direct or indirect sponsors of their trade, not some independent reservoir of knowledge which gradually can be tapped.”<sup>32</sup> The individual researcher, in other words, is often constructed in much the same way as research capacity on an institutional or national level is during this period, as context-dependent. It assumes, in line with the localist discourse, that both history and present conditions affect what *can* be done, what *is* done, when, and by *whom*.

The main form of support during the first decade was financial support to research in international organizations. While the ambition of Sarec was to engage in demand-driven research cooperation based on the priorities of the low-income countries, certain sectors were deemed as vital in terms of development relevance. Though the choice of these sectors may appear as “logical” from some sort of global perspective, it could also be considered inconsistent in relation to the policy of basing the

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development, but I have not included the discussion about this document here. The focus below is mainly on other central documents and to a lesser extent, the interviews.

<sup>28</sup> Sarec (1977). Sarec’s First Year, Annual Report 1975/1976. pp8-9

<sup>29</sup> Sarec (1979). Sarec’s Third Year, Annual Report 1977/1978. p26

<sup>30</sup> Sarec (1981). Sarec Annual Report 1979/1980. p11

<sup>31</sup> Sarec (1977). Sarec’s First Year, Annual Report 1975/1976. p18

<sup>32</sup> Sarec (1979). Sarec’s Second Year, Annual Report 1977/1978. p14

support to low-income countries entirely on their own priorities. Simplifying it a bit, Swedish expertise was to help fill the science and technology gap through acting as catalyzing experts in certain areas of research. At some point, the low-income countries would become capacitated enough to do all parts of the research process on their own. The dilemma of priorities is not limited to the donor-recipient relationship; it is further complicated by the different goals that researchers and policy-makers have, as portrayed by the first annual report:

Those who are themselves involved in research tend to emphasize the free, unplannable and innovative aspects and to stress the long-term usefulness of the research activity, while those who are not themselves engaged in research often put the emphasis on the goals, steering, planning and more immediately useful aspects of the same process.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Sarec suggests that their task is not an easy one. It is not specified exactly which actor they are referring to, it could be the parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Sida for example; but it is a clear reflection of the pressures of combining two areas which are not always entirely compatible.

The first few years of Sarec's policy development illustrates that the research for development discourses are firmly based on a modern science model. The role of the aid actor is portrayed as a catalyst and a bridge, a temporary facilitator of expertise. An ambition to play a more emancipatory role is restricted by path-dependence and the unequal relationship that characterizes "donor-recipient". It is further complicated by the different goals and roles of scientists and politicians and their respective political areas.

### **What is the problem and how can it be solved?**

There are two central perspectives that flow through the policy development of Sarec during its entire existence. I called them the universalist and the localist discourses, and they represent different views of science, knowledge and development. Both discourses, however, "believe in" the power of modern science to enable development in low-income countries, and they consider local/national research capacity to be central. They differ in views of how to achieve development through the use of research; defining development problems in different ways and underlining certain modes of support over others for example.

The localist discourse, with its stronger emphasis on context and anti-colonial critique, is dominant during the first and founding years. The universalist discourse is always by its side, however, underlining the general validity of international research results and defining development in more linear terms. Though neither of the perspectives exists in "pure" form, they represent contrasting points of view that were expressed through the policy documents over time, as well as in the interviews.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p10

## Universalist   Localist

<p>Disciplinary research is highly valued. Some research considered less value-laden than other research (natural and technological sciences)</p>	<p>Inter-disciplinary research is highly valued. All research is considered value-laden.</p>
<p>Universal knowledge and technology. Results-oriented. Technology transfer. Absorptive research capacity (ability to make use of international research results)</p>	<p>Local knowledge and technology. Process-oriented. Local research capacity (ability to conduct research independently)</p>
<p>The interests and priorities of high-income countries dominate.</p>	<p>The interests and priorities of low-income countries dominate.</p>
<p>High-income country actors are experts and catalysts. Low level of critique regarding the role of aid actors.</p>	<p>High-income country actors supply temporary assistance. High level of critique regarding the role of aid actors.</p>
<p>Development is focused on the present and the future. Systems are important, but single factors are significant, not least economic factors</p>	<p>History affects the preconditions of development in the present. Systems are important and many factors are significant, not least social factors.</p>
<p>Development perspectives: modernization theory, neoclassical economics, neoliberalism</p>	<p>Development perspectives: dependency theories, human development, post-development</p>
<p>Modern science as a model for development Local/national research capacity is necessary</p>	

The table above represents a simplification of the diversity that was found through analyzing the material, but there are clearly different perspectives on how research can contribute best to development. The discourses represent an ideational heritage of sorts, which keeps being reflected, reinterpreted and renegotiated with time and new influences.

Nederveen-Pieterse maintains that even though different development actors, such as large international organizations, states or NGOs, have different perspectives and policy preferences; “seen up close, each position itself is a cluster of positions and an arena of different views.”<sup>34</sup> It is to be expected, in other words, that a variety of theoretical perspectives exist in aid actors policies for example. Nevertheless, an important point to make here is that how the “development problem” is conceived has consequences for what kind of “solution” is pursued. Hence if one sees development as relatively universal and predictable, then it appears more logical to create the same research council structure or university management policies in low-income country as in the donor country. The context may still be considered important, but would to a larger degree be expected to adapt to enable

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<sup>34</sup> Nederveen-Pieterse, J. (2010). *Development Theory* (2nd ed), Sage Publications. p188

the new structures and routines rather than the other way around. A more localist view of development would be more likely to question whether the donor country council structure or management policy is the best means to achieve the goals of research in that particular country and context.

An equally important point is that both views consider modern science important for development. Science as a solution is not questioned, even though the localist discourse to a greater degree actively reflects on the value of other knowledge systems. The two differ in the way they define the meaning of development; the kind of research considered most relevant for development; the role of the high-income countries and aid actors and *how* to build capacity.

At times the universalist discourse emphasizes individual researchers as a more important part of research capacity while the localist discourse emphasizes enabling contextual factors like policy, infrastructure, and so on. Both, however, situate these as dependent on each other. The localist discourse also emphasizes the importance of *local* capacity and knowledge more than the universalist discourse, which tends to see knowledge as more universal and thus less dependent on being produced in the low-income countries. According to this line of reasoning, support to international organization research is less problematic since the results are theoretically applicable in all contexts. The localist discourse, however, would tend to favour regional support and bilateral cooperation to strengthen national research capacity.

Even though certain development theories can be associated with each discourse, they are both modernistic in the sense that modern (sometimes called “Western”) research is the model for low-income country development, and they both have emancipatory ambitions in that low-income country self-reliance is a goal. Modern science is certainly questioned from time to time, but it nonetheless remains the model, which makes sense since otherwise one might claim that Sarec did not have a *raison d’être*. Science was considered a means to solve problems and control events, regardless of whether extended goal is to reduce poverty or increase economic growth, or both.

### **The 1980’s. From revolutionary ideas to pragmatism**

As Sarec entered the 1980’s, the annual reports underlined that despite the difficulties of predicting results in research, it was important to develop concrete criteria for evaluating and following up the impact of this aid, in order to justify the investments being made.<sup>35</sup> The need for research capacity was defended with reference to the inadequacy of knowledge and technology transfer where no attention is paid to contextual differences. Basic needs and research were not considered mutually exclusive priorities. Without knowledge, Sarec maintained, there would be no precondition for action. Science and technology was to be seen as a *dimension* of society.<sup>36</sup> Research was portrayed as essential in enabling a country to use its other resources efficiently and independently, something which was not to be out-crowded by other shorter term priorities.

Pragmatism characterized this decade and the emphasis on *results* becomes even more prominent in the annual reports after the 10-year evaluation. Even though self-critique was not as prevalent during the

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<sup>35</sup> Sarec (1985). Sarec Annual Report 1983/1984. p12

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p6

1980's, it was far from absent. Sarec made it a point that it was crucial to always be ready to “question and redefine its activities.”<sup>37</sup> The practice of traditional technology transfer as a development method (coupled with a linear view of innovation) still remained strong among aid actors worldwide during the 1970's and 80's despite being heavily criticized. Sarec positioned itself against this approach:

It is an illusion to view technology as embodied in capital equipment which would make it a commodity to be imported and ready to use. Technology is part of its native organisational culture with its network of directorial responsibilities, maintenance system, level of education and structure of incentives.<sup>38</sup>

A context-sensitive view of technology is promoted here; they maintain that its function is dependent upon the system of which it is part. Transfer of technology is problematic, Sarec maintains, even when “stages of development” are similar, and for low-income countries it can be especially difficult.<sup>39</sup> As support to infrastructure was becoming more relevant and common, Sarec seemed to embrace a somewhat cautious approach in its policy. In relation to laboratory equipment, for instance, they stated that old and modern equipment were often mixed, resulting in quite great contrasts. Without adequate surrounding infrastructure, Sarec maintained, this was not meaningful; research capacity would “not increase just by buying a new piece of equipment.”<sup>40</sup>

During the early 1980's, Sarec frequently underlines the need to see research, technology and development problems from a systemic perspective, where social, economic and technical aspects all play a role. They do so not least when comparing themselves to other donors: “Often, third world countries are faced with the problem of combining gifts of scientific equipment of a range of makes from various donors. Usually, this results in an even more complex laboratory structure than at a Western research institution.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, inadequate foreign aid can result in low-income country laboratories with an incompatible and much too diversified equipment collection which cannot be appropriately maintained. This, Sarec implies, is clearly not support which is based on the low-income country priorities. Instead they suggest “step-by-step betterments within the existent infrastructure”<sup>42</sup> are needed. At the same time, low-income country priorities were not easily defined. In a discussion about the potentially problematic process of setting the agenda, Sarec stated that international priorities tended to be translated uncritically to national priorities. There was often a need for discussion between the low-income country actor and Sarec regarding the feasibility of the priorities identified.<sup>43</sup>

Sarec experiences pressure from various actors during this decade. External evaluators essentially accuse them of being neocolonial through the insistence on creating Swedish-relevant research infrastructure in order to build capacity instead of analyzing what is adequate in each setting. As the bilateral

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<sup>37</sup> Sarec (1981). Sarec Annual Report 1979/1980. p11

<sup>38</sup> Sarec (1984). Sarec Annual Report 1983/1984. p6

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Sarec (1985). Sarec Annual Report 1983/1984. p10

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p13

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p7

cooperation mode of support grows, Sarec sometimes has to mediate between Swedish researchers and low-income country researchers in order to minimize the effect of the inequalities. Two important actors, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, tied Sarec's task more closely to the goals of Swedish aid in general, framing them as a political actor above all. Sarec, however, upheld the scientific nature of their work as their biggest strength, continuing to distinguish itself from other aid. These were not necessarily incompatible framings, but they show that there were slightly different conceptions of Sarec's role.

The universalist discourse takes the upper hand, not least during the second half of the decade. There is greater emphasis on "global" priorities for research and the importance of Swedish expertise. Economic growth is also more often mentioned as an important goal for development. The localistic perspectives remain present and strong, however, and Sarec retains clear emancipatory ambitions and underlines the importance of self-reliant research systems with nationally-based priorities that serve democratic development. Sarec in essence continues to marry a strong faith in modern science with a commitment to improving the influence of low-income country voices.

### **The 1990's. The discourses start to intertwine**

During the early 1990's, a considerable amount of criticism is directed at the organization of science and environmental issues are used as an example to justify the need for more inter-disciplinary research.<sup>44</sup> Scientific disciplines as a way to conduct research are both lauded and found inadequate as a method of contributing to development, and not least sustainable development. Reference is also made to a need for a change of value systems, where "we" in the high income countries must analyze our "culture of instant gratification" and begin to think more about future generations.<sup>45</sup> Science is portrayed as a potential part of the solution to this development, more specifically science with a *systems-perspective*, traditional disciplines together with cross-disciplinary or *horizontal* research efforts.<sup>46</sup> UNCED is criticized for not underlining the *limits to growth* enough, and economics is taken as an example of how science needs to be changed to contribute to sustainable development.<sup>47</sup>

There is no clear dominating discourse in the 1990's; there are strong elements of both the localist and universalist discourses co-existing, and partly intertwining. A localist systems-view is married with a universalist "general solutions"-view. Research that focused too much on economic factors was criticized and a systemic, multi-factor perspective on development was underscored, at the same time as economic factors were actually slightly more underlined than before. Research capacity as emancipatory, a way to independent problem solving, is lifted once again.

The amount of statements to the effect of "this is how you do it", however, increase as well. The problems are global and there are solutions that are relevant to all countries. In a methods document

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Sarec (1994). Sarec Annual Report 1992/1993. pp9-10 and Sarec (1995). Sarec Annual Report 1993/1994. p3 This sometimes seems to be when a new director is making their mark, but of course the character of the annual reports is also affected by many external and internal things that I cannot account for here

<sup>45</sup> Sarec (1995). Sarec Annual Report 1993/1994. p3

<sup>46</sup> See for example Sarec (1992). Sarec Annual Report 1990/1991. pp27-28 and Sarec (1994). Sarec Annual Report 1992/1993. pp5-6

<sup>47</sup> See for example Sarec (1995). Sarec Annual Report 1993/1994. p4

from 1992, Sarec states that “research capacity is an integrated complex made of intellectual, infrastructural, technical and organizational capabilities, embodied in human beings and material things.”<sup>48</sup> The abilities identified ranged from the individual level to the national level, and these abilities were seen as a precondition for more equality in the international research sphere. Discussions about *equality* are present, but the new focus – that of sustainable development – seems equally important. This implies an increased focus on local and traditional knowledge, small-scale projects, at the same time as it is very much about globally defined problems and solutions.<sup>49</sup>

Efforts to make research aid more demand-driven were undertaken towards the middle of the decade as emphasis on all-encompassing institutional support was suggested. At least one strong research university was envisioned each low-income country; it was to be self-reliant and be able to handle large uncertainty and change in relation to environmental problems and technological development. They do this through increased focus on problem-oriented and cross-disciplinary research and by providing higher education to more people. The aid actor is considered a necessary catalyst to this independent future.

There are, as I have discussed before, several tensions in the policies of research aid. One that keeps on resurfacing both explicitly and implicitly is the fact that self-reliance as a goal and a localist view of development as a method exist at the same time as reliance on high-income country scientific institutions is considered a necessary part of this journey. High-income country trajectories are the model for how development is envisioned in Sarec’s policies. There are several ambitions in the policies which are not compatible. Ambitions to make room for new tracks exist, but actually forging them seems difficult.

### **The 2000’s. The quest for sustainable and innovative knowledge societies**

As Sarec approaches the end of the 1990’s, it seems to have begun to find its place within Sida. A new extensive methods document is published and annual reports begin appearing again. Sarec’s policy and methods documents maintained that natural catastrophes, civil wars and environmental destruction added tensions between national and global interests, also affecting aid.<sup>50</sup> *Global security* was a concept that became commonly used within aid circles; it captured the problems of threats to both human welfare and the environment.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, positive development trends were clear; child mortality rates had halved by 2000 compared to 1960, malnutrition rates were significantly reduced, and primary school enrollment had improved.<sup>52</sup>

The relationship between research capacity and development was framed in relation to *sustainable development* during the 1990’s, and the increased focus on *poverty reduction* in the 2000’s as a Swedish foreign aid goal strengthened this framing. The focus on poverty reduction also sparked a renewed

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<sup>48</sup> Bhagavan, M. R. (1992). The SAREC model: institutional cooperation and the strengthening of national research capacity in developing countries. Stockholm, SAREC. p44

<sup>49</sup> Akin to the concept of glocalization. See for example Featherstone, M., S. Lash, et al. (1995). *Global Modernities*, SAGE Publications. P26

<sup>50</sup> Sarec (1998, 2000). *Research Cooperation II. Trends in Development Research*, Sida. p7

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p7

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p8



interest the social and economic aspects of sustainable development. The global and the local are portrayed as inextricably intertwined, something which is made clearly visible in the case of environmental problems and its unequal effects on already unequal relations. Science and technology were seen as contributing to a strengthening of destructive forces, driving society and the environment in a negative direction. The view of the future was equally bleak a few years earlier, in the policy and methods document. Sarec stated that “to avoid irreversible global catastrophes,” high and low-income countries must “jointly embark on the road to sustainable development” by innovating and reducing consumption.<sup>53</sup> In the policies, the environmental problems are portrayed as being mostly the fault of the high-income countries, but sustainable development is constructed as something only possible if the high and low-income countries join forces.

The concept of *innovation* had tagged along since Sarec’s beginning, and a “systems-thinking” was not new either in the sense that different actors, policies, institutions and other components and conditions had been envisioned to depend on each other in the national context. In the 2000’s, however, the use of “systems of innovation” appeared more consistently.<sup>54</sup> Innovation is framed as a way to turn research results into concrete poverty reduction action through economic growth. In contrast, the directors did not talk much about innovation or economic growth; they underlined the importance of research capacity as crucial for independent problem-solving and higher quality in university education first and foremost.

The “special case of research” (*forskningens särart*) is a recurring theme in both the documents and the interviews concerning this decade. The differences between research aid and other aid (Sarec and Sida) was an issue since the start of Sarec, but it becomes extra pronounced during the late 1990’s and 2000’s. In 2008, the politics governing Swedish aid were reformed, resulting in among other things far fewer collaborating countries and revised foreign aid goals. Some key words used by foreign aid minister Gunilla Carlsson in the information about changes to come within Swedish aid were efficiency and comparative advantage (“Sweden cannot do everything everywhere”).<sup>55</sup> Similar to the fusion of Sida, Sarec, BITS and SwedeCorp in 1995, this reorganization was preceded by a change in government. Sida was reorganized completely, and Sarec along with it.

## **Now what? Potential practical implications**

Foreign aid is a contentious area of politics, full of opinions, perspectives and clashes in the struggle to define futures. The combination of research and foreign aid politics can, as has been shown, be problematic; foreign aid and research have different modus operandi, and are somewhat at odds with one other when it comes to the goals and definitions of capacity building for example. What kind of capacity should be built, why, where and how long should it take? Is it local individual capacity, institutional capacity or both? Is the purpose to contribute to development over a longer time period, or are general, internationally valid research *results* more important? How are these different capacities and results measured and evaluated?

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p21

<sup>54</sup> See for example Sida-Sarec (2005). Research Cooperation 2004. Research Makes Sense.

<sup>55</sup> Carlsson, G. (2007). The New Development Cooperation (ppt), The Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

What can one learn from this case? At the risk of sounding monotonous, it depends on what one is striving for. In essence, this study enables critical thinking about research aid policy today; it can shed light on the types of theories underlying the politics of aid so that its practical realities may serve development in a way that all the central stakeholders can agree on. A certain diversity in the policy is to be expected and can be a productive battle of views. Nevertheless, I claim that an active awareness of the various theoretical underpinnings can contribute to a more consistent, effective and flexible policy. In this section I turn to previous research in order to relate back to some of the central issues that I began with, and use them to reflect on the findings of my study.

There seems to be consensus in the literature concerning the idea that Swedish foreign aid has consistently had a wide definition of development, with poverty reduction as a leading motivation. Sweden has become known for large volumes of aid, untied and demand-sensitive, even emancipatory in its approaches, even though Sweden may well provide aid for other reasons than solidarity. Political science researcher Anna Brodin maintains in her doctoral thesis about development cooperation workers that the view of Sweden as a donor (“the darling of the third world”) has changed since the introduction of the OECD.<sup>56</sup> This view is echoed by Lennart Wolgemuth and Bertil Odén who state that Sweden was running very much its own aid agenda in international comparison, until at least the 1980’s.<sup>57</sup> They claim that the time after the end of the Cold War and the EU-expansion has seen Sweden become more of a mainstream donor:

A change in the perception of the role of Swedish aid has been evident in recent years. The basic element of trust between two sovereign states seems to have weakened as indicated by increasing demand for control measures. [...] The new results agenda, as described above, is a major feature of this new attitude. The more skeptical attitude towards partnership with governments has also meant that aid is channeled increasingly through non-governmental actors, in particular the private business sector in the partner countries. Thus, Swedish development cooperation seems to have become more supply-driven and less demand-driven; the influence of the receiving partner has been reduced while Swedish views and ideas of what is most suitable for the receiver are on the increase (Government Decision, 2013-07-11, Development Today 2012-04-11).<sup>58</sup>

Plenty of well-intended policies have been written in recent years, but without adequate funds to go with them they remain without great effect, they claim. Aid has become perceived of more as “Swedish activities in foreign countries” rather than support to activities in partner countries. They are critical of this trend and maintain that it erodes sustainability of cooperation.<sup>59</sup> A recent dissertation by Tomas Kjellkvist (former director at Sarec, 2008-2010) is also critical of how Swedish foreign aid has developed in the last two decades. Among other things, Kjellkvist maintains that the concept of capacity building

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<sup>56</sup> Brodin, A. (2000). Getting politics right : democracy promotion as a new conflict issue in foreign aid policy Doctoral thesis, University of Gothenburg. pp35-37

<sup>57</sup> See for example Sogge, D. (2002). Give and Take? What’s the Matter with Foreign Aid? , Zed Books. p78

<sup>58</sup> Odén, B. and L. Wohlgemuth (2013). Swedish Development Cooperation Policy in an International Perspective, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. p60

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p64

has been reconfigured as a top-down approach, serving the interests of donors rather than low-income countries.<sup>60</sup> He concludes that aid has become very abstract and policy-driven in the last decade.

Looking beyond the policy, it is important to question how the implementation works and whether there are sufficient resources and organizational preconditions to live up to the intentions in the policy. This is something my study does not cover, but it is a logical next question to ask. As a way to problematize the policy and practice of both bilateral and international aid actors, policy researcher Nancy Birdsall presents “seven deadly sins” committed by donors: impatience (with institution building); envy (collusion and coordination failure); ignorance (failure to evaluate); pride (failure to exit), sloth (pretending participation is sufficient for ownership), greed (unreliable as well as stingy transfers) and foolishness (underfunding of global and regional public goods).<sup>61</sup> Birdsall envisions “fixes” for these sins as well, such as: the adoption of longer-term commitments (seven years and longer) tied with incremental financing tied to explicit goals concerning increases in capacity; a revival in support to long-term education and training; increased concentration of resources to fewer countries or to multilateral efforts to avoid inefficient donor overload; more independent and international evaluations of aid actors; and donors basing activities more on the proposals from low-income countries instead of shaping programs themselves.<sup>62</sup> This is just an example of the research being done on the workings of aid, but it points to the complexity involved in balancing national interests with solidarity and different views of development and the role of aid.

Turning back to my empirical material: the interviews with former directors suggest that one of the reasons why Sarec seemed to be quite successful at capacity building was the fact that they had a critical mass of knowledgeable staff who also worked relatively close to each other. Another factor which was presented as crucial for being able to do “good research aid” was having the ability to work on several levels and with different types of aid. This entailed having influence on what kind of projects the large international organizations engaged in for example, and then being able to coordinate and create links between international research and bilateral cooperation. This ability was reduced through reorganizations, and responsibilities for different levels and types of aid pertaining to research were not as easily “harmonized” anymore. Furthermore, recent evaluation and publications have pointed to the effects of personnel cuts at Sida on research.<sup>63</sup> Scidev.net published a follow-up story on the state of Swedish research aid post-2008 and among other things they show that the capacity-oriented efforts have been reduced considerably for various reasons. At the same time, the *policy and strategy* for 2010-2014 remained very similar to its precedents concerning the task and major modes of work.

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<sup>60</sup> Kjellqvist, T. (2013). Biståndspolitikens motsägelser om kunskap och tekniköverföring - från konkret praktik till abstrakt policy. doctoral dissertation series, Blekinge Institute of Technology. p271

<sup>61</sup> Birdsall, N. (2008). Seven Deadly Sins: Reflections on Donor Failings. Reinventing Foreign Aid. W. Easterly, MIT Press. p516

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp519-540

<sup>63</sup> See for example Fellesson, M. and M. Härsmar (2012). "Review of Sida's Programme for Development Research. Evaluation of "U-forsk", 2006-2012" and Scidev.net (2014), *Swedish government control 'harming SIDA's research*, <http://www.scidev.net/global/cooperation/news/swedish-government-sida--research.html>, accessed 091214. They also published a story on my dissertation earlier this year: Scidev.net (2014), *Aid funders urged to recognise assumptions in research cooperation*, <http://www.scidev.net/global/aid/news/aid-funders-assumptions-research-cooperation.html>, accessed 091214

Assuming that all countries should have the same system may foster continued unequal or expert/novice relations. At the same time, the currently dominating system for scientific collaboration and publication is steered by certain routines and standards (peer review, conferences, certain expressed values etc) which are practical to follow in order for international collaboration to be made possible. Perhaps it is a matter of fostering diversity in the system as well as adapting to the dominating forms. Either way, previous research as well as my own study suggests that simply assuming that a high-income country university can and should be copied and pasted into a low-income country context is not desirable. It could instead be a discussion about which functions of a typical modern university institution could work well in this particular context. Do aid actor's policies seek to strengthen equality between collaborating partners? Who controls the money, the reporting and administration? What kinds of knowledge are valued? Do all actors involved actively assume and make explicit that there are mutual benefits to any research collaboration? Are strengths and weaknesses openly and explicitly discussed?

The risk of maintaining or increasing dependency is an ever-present dilemma, and research aid seems to contain unavoidable tensions, such as the one of resource inequality between partners. Another tension consists of the sometimes conflicting time-frames of development research versus research capacity building. In a 1992 evaluation on bilateral cooperation, Widstrand and Valdelin stated "Sida is Sida and Sarec is Sarec and the twain shall never meet," illustrating the fact that research aid has been a special case in several ways.<sup>64</sup> The task of research aid has clearly entailed strenuous boundary-balancing in order to fulfil its objectives in relation to various political actors. The roles of these actors are to a large extent black-boxed in this study, but the fact remains, that the government, the parliament and the two ministries are responsible for producing the general policies and goals that agencies like Sida and Sarec have to adhere to. Some of the former directors as well as previous studies suggest that aid to research should not be couched within the general foreign aid apparatus given that it implies increased politicization and thereby assumed to be more subject to short-term priorities.<sup>65</sup> They maintain that there should be an independent organization where scientific values can dominate and a critical mass of knowledgeable people can coordinate research cooperation and finance capacity building.

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<sup>64</sup> Widstrand, C. and J. Valdelin (1990). An Evaluation of the Bilateral Institutional Research Co-operation supported by Sarec. p27

<sup>65</sup> See for example Edqvist, O. (2009). Gränslös forskning, Nya Doxa.