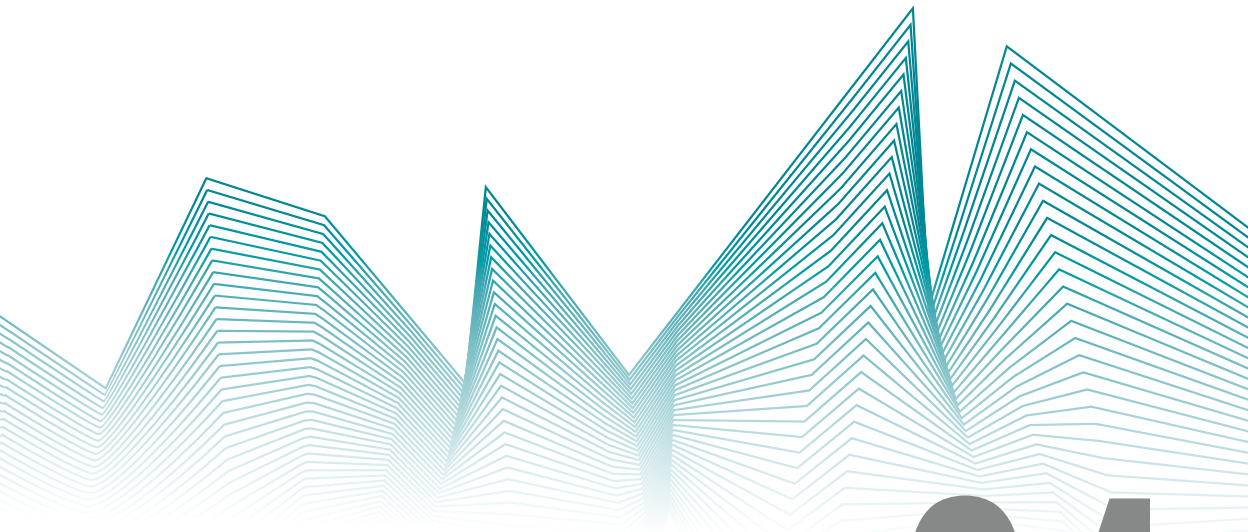




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**EVALUATION OF SIDA'S APPLICATION OF
MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY ANALYSES**

Ingela Ternström and Inge Tvedten, with contributions from Fredrik Ugglå

Evaluation of Sida's Application of Multidimensional Poverty Analyses

Ingela Ternström and Inge Tvedten,
with contributions from Fredrik Ugglå

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to

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

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Foreword by EBA

The overarching objective of Swedish development cooperation is “to create conditions for improved living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression”. Poverty has in this context been understood to have many dimensions, hence should not be measured solely in monetary terms. In response to this steering, Sida has since 2017 conducted multidimensional poverty analyses (MDPA) as one basis for its input to the government’s decision of bilateral aid strategies for partner countries.

Bilateral aid strategies take various factors and objectives into consideration. However, the MDPA is the only analysis tool that focuses on the overarching poverty reduction objective. EBA initiated this evaluation to find out what roles these analyses have played. Have the analyses helped focusing aid on poverty reduction, and have the MDPA processes been ‘institutionalised’ within Sida?

The findings of the evaluation show that the outcomes from MDPA are mainly indirect. Outcomes are primarily in the form of a widely shared view on poverty within Sida, with visibility for partners. However, they recommend Sida to deepen its use of MDPA as a planning tool. To make the tool more effective and less cumbersome to use they propose four different future ‘models’ to choose from.

We hope this evaluation will be of use to leadership and staff within Sida, and at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs when designing partner country strategies and development cooperation programs.

The study has been conducted with the support of a reference group chaired by Jenny Deschamps-Berger, member of the EBA. The authors are solely responsible for the content of the report.

Stockholm, September 2025

Torbjörn Becker

Jenny Deschamps-Berger

Sammanfattning

Det övergripande målet för Sveriges utvecklingsbistånd är förbättrade levnadsvillkor för människor som lever i fattigdom och under förtryck. Målet bekräftas årligen av riksdagen och Sverige har sedan länge en multidimensionell syn på fattigdom och fattigdomsbekämpning. Ett viktigt verktyg i arbetet är Sidas analytiska ramverk för multidimensionell fattigdomsanalys (MDPA). Rapporten presenterar resultaten av en utvärdering av om och hur Sidas MDPA påverkar den övergripande styrningen mot fattigdomsminskning.

Debatten om hur fattigdom ska mätas och minskas är fortsatt livlig. Ett endimensionellt fokus på inkomstfattigdom har länge dominerat, men kritiserats för att det utesluter bredare sociala och subjektiva aspekter av välfärd. Multidimensionella modeller, många med fokus på levnadsstandard, utbildning och hälsa, har blivit alltmer populära.

Sidas MDPA är ett av de mest omfattande ramverk som används av officiella givarorganisationer för att analysera fattigdom. Ramverket utgår från en multidimensionell syn på fattigdom, och därmed att en multifacetterad ansats krävs för att minska fattigdomen. Med utgångspunkt i fyra dimensioner av fattigdom och fyra kontexter identifierar modellen vem som är fattig, hur och varför. Sida definierar den som saknar resurser samt har brist på möjligheter, säkerhet eller inflytande som fattig. Genom analys av dessa fyra dimensioner beskriver MDPA på vilket sätt individer är fattiga. Analysen av den politiska, ekonomiska, säkerhetsmässiga och miljömässiga kontexten söker sedan beskriva varför människor är fattiga.

Sidas MDPA introducerades 2017, den har vidareutvecklats samtidigt som stora förändringar skett i omvärlden. Den globala fattigdomsnivån har minskat avsevärt de senaste decennierna men sedan covidpandemin 2019 har utvecklingen stannat av. Idag är den extrema fattigdomen huvudsakligen koncentrerad till Afrika söder om Sahara och andra sårbara och konfliktdrabbade regioner, med stora ojämlikheter mellan regioner och länder. Samtidigt präglas det

globala utvecklingssamarbetet av växande komplexitet med geopolitiska förändringar, ökade humanitära behov, förändrade prioriteringar och minskade bidrag från givarländer.

Sverige har länge ansetts ligga i framkant inom internationellt utvecklingssamarbete, med fattigdomsminskning i centrum. Det övergripande målet ligger fast men även i Sverige har prioriteringarna förändrats. Biståndsbudgeten har minskat, enprocentsmålet har övergivits och en ny agenda för biståndet har införts. Denna innebär ökad betoning på svenska intressen, handel och privat sektor, synergier mellan bistånd och migration, samt nya partnerländer där Ukraina nu är största mottagarland. De ändrade prioriteringarna innebär också minskat fokus på ett brett fattigdomsperspektiv och fattiga människors perspektiv. Rollen för multidimensionella fattigdomsanalyser har blivit mer oviss.

Utvärderingen är således aktuell, både med tanke på den försämrade fattigdomssituationen i många av Sveriges traditionella samarbetsländer, de förändrade globala såväl som svenska biståndsprioriteringarna, samt ökande krav på biståndseffektivitet.

Syfte och metod

Syftet med utvärderingen är att bedöma om, och i vilken utsträckning, det svenska bilaterala biståndet medvetet påverkas och/eller styrs av multidimensionella fattigdomsanalyser. Utvärderingen ska också bedöma vilka olika typer av resultatanalyserna har lett till – både konkreta effekter på det svenska bilaterala biståndet och mer abstrakta effekter på hur Sidas personal förstår fattigdom och fattigdomsbekämpning. Uppdraget specificeras i tre utvärderingsfrågor:

- Har den multidimensionella ”synen på fattigdom” institutionaliserats, och följer Sidas personal MDPA-ramverkets modell och process? Leder användandet av MDPA till samsyn inom Sida om vad som utgör fattigdom och vilka åtgärder för att minska fattigdom som är effektiva?

- Vilka resultat har MDPA lett till (i termer av synliga resultat såväl som uppfattningar bland Sidas personal)? Har de genomförda analyserna varit praktiskt användbara för att prioritera – välja och välja bort – sektorer, inriktningar, projekt eller arbetsområden? Har andra typer av resultat framkommit?
- Vilka lärdomar kan dras om MDPA-instrumentets förtjänster och värde för att medvetet styra det svenska bilaterala biståndet mot fattigdomsminskande insatser?

Utvärderingen använder en teoribaserad metod. Den utgår från en förändringsteori för MDPA (återskapad av teamet) och ett övergripande ramverk med fokus på relationen mellan institutionella strukturer och mänsklig handling. Metoden har gjort det möjligt att presentera evidensbaserade resultat och slutsatser.

Data har samlats in med hjälp av dokumentanalys, intervjuer med UD- och Sida-personal samt samarbetspartners, och en online-enkät till Sida-personal på ambassader. Sex länder identifierades för mer ingående analys, tre av dessa besöktes (Bangladesh, Liberia och Kenya) och i tre skedde intervjuer online (Demokratiska republiken Kongo, Moldavien och Moçambique).

Studien är begränsad till bilateralt bistånd genom Sida och inkluderar inte den del av Sidas bidrag som genomförs genom globala program. Utvärderingen är begränsad till MDPA och dess tillämpning, och hur kvaliteten, relevansen och resultaten av MDPA-ramverket har påverkat utformningen av svenskt bistånd. Utvärderingen har däremot inte ambitionen att mäta effekterna på fattigdomsminskning i sig.

Resultat och slutsatser

Utvärderingen finner att MDPA fyller sitt syfte – att öka fattigdomsrelevansen i svenskt utvecklingssamarbete. MDPA åstadkommer detta genom en kombination av uttalade och implicita processer – som ett instrument för strategisk planering av insatser, genom input till strategiprocesser, som en mekanism för intern kapacitetsutveckl-

ing och konsensus, och som ett sätt att stärka fokus på det övergripande målet för svenskt utvecklingssamarbete.

MDPA har haft direkt och indirekt påverkan på strategiutveckling och insatshantering och har bidragit till en institutionell samsyn och internalisering av ett multidimensionellt perspektiv på fattigdom på Sida. Utvärderingen drar slutsatsen att multidimensionella fattigdomsanalyser fortsatt bör ha en roll i svenskt utvecklingssamarbete.

Har den multidimensionella synen på fattigdom institutionaliserats?

Den multidimensionella synen på fattigdom är institutionaliserad och användandet av MDPA har bidragit till konsensus inom Sida om vad som utgör fattigdom och effektiva sätt att minska fattigdom. Däremot refererar regeringens strategidokument för bistånd och fattigdomsminskning sällan till MDPA-rapporter eller multidimensionell fattigdom. Nya policy-direktiv har bidragit till en oklar roll för MDPA – detta trots det årligen fastslagna målet om minskad fattigdom.

Sedan MDPA introducerades 2017 har ramverket blivit väl känt och fått en viktig roll i Sidas arbete. Sida-personal möter och relaterar till MDPA genom ett antal instruktioner och verktyg och i processen att genomföra MDPA-analyser och producera MDPA-rapporter. MDPA-ramverket kan därmed anses vara väl institutionaliserat i Sida som organisation.

Det finns också en bred uppslutning kring begreppet 'multidimensionell fattigdom' och att en multifacetterad ansats är nödvändig för att minska fattigdomen. Förståelsen och acceptansen för detta har stärkts genom implementering och satsning på MDPA. MDPA har också bidragit starkt till att hålla fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning i fokus på Sidas agenda.

Bland enskilda Sida-medarbetare varierar dock graden av förståelse, engagemang och användande av MDPA, liksom huruvida de anser

att MDPA är relevant för policyer, strategier och det operativa arbetet. MDPA är därmed inte fullt internaliserad bland Sidas personal som ett sätt att analysera och bedöma fattigdom och insatser för minskad fattigdom.

Vilka resultat har MDPA lett till?

Trots att de dokumenterade, spårbara effekterna av MDPA-ramverket är begränsade på strategi- och operationell nivå, finns en allmän uppfattning hos de intervjuade är att MDPA-rapporter och processer används för prioriteringar och har en indirekt påverkan på styrningen av Sidas insatser.

Utvärderingen har funnit begränsade konkreta och dokumenterade effekter av MDPA i processen att utveckla bistånds-strategier. Det finns en viss överlappning mellan strategimål och de bindande begränsningar som identifieras i MDPA-rapporter, men givet att både strategimål och begränsningar tenderar att uttryckas i tämligen generella termer är det svårt att dra slutsatser om påverkan. De breda slutsatserna om vem som är fattig, hur och varför som presenteras i MDPA-rapporterna gör det också svårt att bedöma graden av överensstämmelse mellan dessa och prioriteringar i valet och utformningen av insatser och specifika målgrupper.

Analysen indikerar dock att effekten av MDPA på strategi- och operationell inte enbart har sitt ursprung i explicit användande av MDPA-rapporterna utan till stor del sker genom lärdomar från MDPA-processen och institutionalisering av MDPA och ett multidimensionellt perspektiv på fattigdom.

MDPA-ramverket har hjälpt Sidas personal att hålla fokus på multidimensionell fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning i en period av föränderlig biståndskontext. Dessutom har MDPA-processen bidragit till professionell samstämmighet på ambassadernas Sida-enheter, genom att öka kunskap och förståelse för multidimensionell fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning. Processen har bidragit till ökad gemen-

skap i arbetsgrupper, men även till stress och frustration på grund av ökad arbetsbelastning och oklara instruktioner.

Institutionaliseringen av MDPA-ramverket har också bidragit till Sidas rykte som en partner som tar fattigdomsbekämpning på allvar, även om få av dem har läst MDPA-dokument eller anammat modellen i den egna verksamheten.

Har MDPA-instrumentet använts för att medvetet styra det svenska bilaterala biståndet?

MDPA-ramverket har haft både direkt och indirekt påverkan på beslutsfattande och strategisk inriktning på svenskt bilateralt bistånd.

Utvärderingen har visat att MDPA-ramverket är ett resultat av strategiska val med syfte att stärka och formalisera fokuset på fattigdomsreducering i Sida, genom ett multidimensionellt perspektiv på fattigdom. Ramverket är välkänt och används i relativt hög utsträckning.

Ramverkets inflytande på den strategiska inriktningen av svenskt bistånd på land- och ambassadnivå begränsas av regeringens övergripande politiska och policy-hänsyn, konkurrerande strategier och andra prioriteringar på programnivå. Utvärderingen har också visat att resultaten av MDPA-processer inte alltid når strategiprocessen.

MDPA-ramverket har dock, genom att bidra till samsyn, gemensamt lärande och internalisering av en multidimensionell syn på fattigdom, haft en indirekt påverkan på biståndets sammansättning och inriktning, och för Sveriges och Sidas fortsatta fokus på fattigdomsminskning genom ett multidimensionellt perspektiv.

Utvärderingens analys av ramverket och de MDPA-rapporter som producerats visar att den övergripande beskrivningen av kontext och de fyra dimensionerna av fattigdom ofta håller god kvalitet. Dock saknas en teoretisk/analytisk grund för en mer gedigen analys av orsakssamband som krävs för att identifiera bindande begränsningar.

Ramverket erbjuder också begränsade möjligheter att inkludera metoder för att på ett fullgott sätt förstå hur de människor som lever i fattigdom ser på sin situation och sina möjligheter att förbättra den.

I nuläget, när många partnerländer upplever en minskning av biståndet, är det av yttersta vikt att ha en god förståelse för, och prioritera, de mest utsatta grupperna – MDPA i sin nuvarande utformning fyller inte helt det syftet.

Rekommendationer

Rekommendationerna utgår från slutsatsen att multidimensionella fattigdomsanalyser har bidragit till att hålla fokus på fattigdomsminskning och en samsyn kring hur fattigdom ska mätas och motverkas, och därmed till det övergripande målet för svenskt bistånd att bidra till förbättrade levnadsvillkor för människor som lever i fattigdom och under förtryck. Utvärderingen har dock identifierat ett antal svagheter och ger följande rekommendationer:

Utveckla en förändringsteori för MDPA

Huvudrekommendationen är att Sida bör revidera eller utveckla en detaljerad förändringsteori som i detalj beskriver hur MDPA-ramverket är avsett att bidra till målen för det svenska utvecklingssamarbetet. En sådan förändringsteori bör inkludera alla syften och delmål, processer och antaganden som ingår i planen för att nå detta mål – såväl formaliserade och explicita, som implicita mål. Detta kommer att hjälpa Sida att skräddarsy MDPA-ramverket efter dess syfte, målsättningar och förutsättningar och göra det till ett mer effektivt verktyg. Med tydligare mål och delmål skulle argument och motivation för att investera i MDPA-processer stärkas.

Förändringsteorin och MDPA-ramverket bör sedan regelbundet ses över för att bedöma om förändringar behövs för att stärka Sidas fokus på människor som lever i fattigdom och under förtryck i Sveriges samarbetsländer.

Förtydliga och integrera användningen av MDPA i Sida

Sida kan förtydliga MDPA-ramverkets genomslagskraft och öka dess integrering i verksamheten ytterligare genom att oftare och mer systematiskt använda centrala begrepp och termer från MDPA-ramverket i andra delar av verksamheten, t.ex. i rapporterings- och planeringssystem.

Sida kan också ta initiativ som öppnar upp för ett ökat ömsesidigt lärande och diskussioner kring MDPA mellan Sidas enheter i Stockholm och på ambassaderna, samt mellan olika ambassader. MDPA-rapporterna bör vara lättillgängliga och ett internetbaserat diskussionsforum bör övervägas.

Att använda MDPA-rapporter och terminologi mer systematiskt i kommunikationen med utvecklingspartners, både i Sverige och i samarbetsländerna, skulle också bidra till ökad förståelse och spridning av det multidimensionella perspektivet på fattigdom.

Ompröva formatet och rollen för MDPA

Med utgångspunkt i den utvecklade förändringsteorin bör Sida maximera MDPA-ramverkets potentiella effekt och göra det till ett mer användbart verktyg för ett fortsatt fokus på multidimensionell fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning inom svenskt utvecklingssamarbete. Nedan presenteras fyra förslag som inspiration för en modifierad MDPA:

Den första modellen (en ”stärkt MDPA”) baseras på antagandet att MDPA bör spela en avgörande roll för att uppfylla det övergripande målet att bidra till förbättrade levnadsvillkor för människor som lever i fattigdom och under förtryck. I denna modell stärks MDPA:s position och roll i strategiprocesser och i det operativa arbetet. En reviderad MDPA, som återspeglar dynamiken i fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning och även inkluderar operativa slutsatser, blir obligatorisk för alla Sveriges samarbetsländer.

Den andra modellen (en ”nedskalad MDPA”) innebär att MDPA utvecklas till en mer analytisk, fokuserad och förenklad modell som är mindre tidskrävande att tillämpa för Sida och dess personal. Analysen förlitar sig mindre på internationell statistik och mer på landbaserad kvantitativa och kvalitativa studier och expertis, och blir mer av ett ”levande dokument”. Syftet är fortfarande att bidra till ett fortsatt fokus på det övergripande målet om fattigdomsminskning och informera såväl strategiprocess som operativt arbete på landnivå.

I den tredje modellen (en ”operativ MDPA”) minskar fokuset på att generera input till strategiprocessen och MDPA blir i stället primärt ett instrument för operationalisering och eventuell uppföljning av strategibeslut. I denna modell genomförs inte någon generell MDPA, utan fokus ligger på operationalisering och identifiering av målgrupper inom de specifika sektorer som identifierats i strategin. MDPA skulle även fungera som ett instrument för att uppnå större integration mellan de olika sektorer där Sida är aktivt.

Den fjärde modellen (en ”kollektivt lärande MDPA”) betonar i större utsträckning MDPA som en metod för gemensamt lärande, kollektivt utbyte och strategisk diskussion. I en sådan modell är MDPA inte primärt knuten till specifika steg i strategiprocessen utan ses snarare som ett verktyg för kontinuerlig bedömning och diskussion om multidimensionell fattigdom och fattigdomsminskning. Fokus flyttas därför från att utarbeta rapporter och input till strategiprocessen till förberedelser och möjligheter till ständig gemensam diskussion mellan relevanta strategiägare.

Summary

The overarching and long-standing objective of Swedish development aid, as confirmed annually by the Swedish Parliament, is improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. Sweden takes a multidimensional approach to poverty and poverty reduction. A key tool is the Multidimensional Poverty Analysis framework (MDPA) applied by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (Sida). This report presents the results of an evaluation that assesses how the MDPA contributes to the overarching steering towards poverty reduction.

Debates about poverty reduction policies and their accompanying measurements are lively. A unidimensional focus on income poverty has dominated for long but has been criticized for its exclusion of wider social and subjective components of well-being. Instead, multidimensional approaches have grown in popularity, typically measuring deprivation in standards of living, education and health.

Sida's MDPA is among the most comprehensive frameworks applied by official donor agencies to assess poverty. The framework presupposes multidimensional poverty, and hence that poverty reduction requires multifaceted approaches. The framework assesses four dimensions of poverty and four contextual variables to identify who is poor, how, and why. Sida's definition of who is poor involves deprivation in resources as well as lack of human security, power and voice, and opportunities and choice. Through analysis of these four dimensions of poverty, the MDPA describes how people are poor. By analysing the political, economic, security and environmental contexts, the framework attempts to explain why people are poor.

The development of the MDPA – introduced in 2017 – has taken place under changing circumstances. While global poverty rates decreased considerably from 1990 to 2024, progress has stalled since 2019 with the Covid pandemic as a turning point. Today, extreme poverty is predominantly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and

other fragile, and conflict-affected regions, with persistent global inequalities between regions and countries. At the same time, recent trends in global Official Development Assistance (ODA) reveal a complex landscape influenced by geopolitical shifts, increased humanitarian needs, changing donor priorities and reduced funding.

Sweden has long been seen to be in the forefront of international development cooperation with poverty reduction as central. However, although the overarching objective of improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression remains, changing priorities are underway also in Sweden. ODA funding has been reduced, the one-percent goal has been abandoned and a new 'Reform Agenda' has been introduced. This includes enhanced emphasis on Swedish interests, trade and private sector, synergies between aid and migration, and new partner constellations. It also includes a decreased focus on multidimensional poverty analyses, the broadly defined perspectives on poverty and poor people's perspective on poverty reduction.

Hence, the evaluation is timely, both with respect to the deteriorating poverty situation in many of Sweden's traditional countries of cooperation, the increasing calls for aid effectiveness and the changing global as well as Swedish ODA priorities.

Purpose and method

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether, and to what extent, Swedish bilateral aid is consciously influenced and/or steered by multidimensional poverty analyses. It aims to assess the various types of outcomes they have resulted in, including tangible effects on Swedish bilateral aid and more abstract effects on how Sida staff understand poverty and poverty alleviation. More specifically, there are three evaluation questions:

- Has the multidimensional ‘view on poverty’ been institutionalised, and are staff adhering to the MDPA model and process? Does the MDPA practice lead to consensus within Sida as to what constitutes poverty and effective measures to reduce poverty?
- What outcomes have the MDPA led to (in terms of visible outcomes as well as according to the perception among Sida staff)? Have the conducted analyses been practically useful for prioritising – select and deselect – sectors, directions, projects, or areas of work? Have other kinds of outcomes emerged?
- What lessons may be learned as to the merit and value of the MDPA instrument in consciously steering Swedish bilateral aid towards poverty reducing interventions?

The evaluation is framed by a theory-based approach, combining an overall framework focussing on the relation between institutional structures and human agency and a theory of change reconstructed for the purpose of the evaluation. This approach has enabled the team to reach evidence-based findings and develop conclusions – and identify lessons learned for users of the evaluation.

The team applied a mix of different data collection methods, consisting of document review, interviews with MFA/Sida staff as well as partners, and an online survey. Six countries were identified for in-depth studies – three of these were visited (Bangladesh, Liberia and Kenya) and three were assessed through online interviews (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Moldova and Mozambique).

This is an evaluation of the MDPA as an analytical concept and tool and its application, and how the quality, relevance and results of the MDPA as such has affected Swedish aid – and hence not an attempt to assess effects on poverty reduction per se. The study is limited to bilateral aid and does not include the part of Sida's contributions that are executed through global programmes.

Findings and conclusions

Overall, the evaluation finds that the MDPA achieves its purpose – to increase the poverty relevance of Swedish development cooperation.

The MDPA does this through a combination of explicit and less documented ways – as an instrument for strategic planning of interventions and input to the strategy process, as a mechanism for internal building of competence and consensus, and as a way to put focus on the overriding objective of Swedish development cooperation – improved living conditions of people living in poverty – while making make aid more effective in reducing poverty.

Through its tangible and intangible effects on Swedish development strategies and portfolio and contribution development – and on Sida’s institutional cohesion and joint learning and internalisation of the multidimensional understanding of poverty among its staff – the evaluation concludes that multidimensional poverty analyses should have a continued role in maintaining a focus on multidimensional poverty reduction in Swedish development cooperation in some form or another.

Has the multidimensional ‘view on poverty’ been institutionalised?

The multidimensional view on poverty has largely been institutionalised and the MDPA practice has contributed to consensus within Sida as to what constitutes poverty and effective measures to reduce poverty. However, and despite the annually renewed objective of poverty reduction, multidimensional poverty and MDPA reports are rarely referred to in the government’s strategy documents for development cooperation and poverty reduction, and changing policy directives have confused the position of the MDPA.

Since its establishment in 2017, the MDPA approach has become well known and played an important role in Sida’s work. Sida staff

encounter and relate to MDPAs through a number of guidelines and instructions and in the process of producing MDPA reports. As such, the MDPA framework is institutionalised in Sida as an organisation.

There is also broad adherence to the general notion of ‘multi-dimensional poverty’ and that a multifaceted approach to poverty reduction is necessary. The understanding and adherence to this notion has been strengthened by the implementation and promotion of the MDPA. The MDPA has also had an important role in keeping poverty and poverty reduction on the Sida agenda.

At the level of individual Sida staff members, the understanding and application of the MDPA process to assess poverty is not internalised and reproduced to the same extent and perceptions about the objectives of the exercise and the extent to which they regard it as relevant for their work vary.

What outcomes have the MDPA led to?

The documented (visible) outcomes of the MDPA model at strategy and operational levels are limited, but a common perception among staff is that MDPA reports and processes are used for prioritising and affects programming indirectly.

The evaluation has found limited explicit, documented effects of MDPAs on the process of making development strategies. There are overlaps between strategy goals and constraints identified in MDPA reports at a more general level but given the broad nature of both goals and constraints the link is at times tenuous. The broad nature of conclusions regarding who is poor, how and why, in the MDPAs also makes it difficult to assess the extent of correlation between MDPAs and prioritisations in the form of portfolio composition, contribution design and more specific target groups.

However, the analysis indicates that the impact of the MDPA at strategy and operational levels is not mainly via explicit use of MDPA reports, but rather via learnings from the MDPA process and

the institutionalisation of the MDPA and a multidimensional perspective on poverty.

The MDPA has an important role for Sida staff in keeping their focus on multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction in a changing ODA environment. Furthermore, the process of producing the MDPAs has contributed to professional cohesion at Sida units at embassies, by increasing knowledge and understanding of multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction in the local context. It has contributed to teambuilding and professional cohesion at the workplace, but also to stress and frustration due to increased workload and unclear instructions.

Another effect is that the institutionalisation of the MDPA has contributed to Sida's reputation as a partner who takes poverty reduction seriously - although few of the partners interviewed seemed to have read MDPA documents or applied the model. However, many of them use other sources of multidimensional poverty assessment and data.

Has the MDPA instrument been used to consciously steering Swedish bilateral aid?

The MDPA has influenced decision-making and the strategic direction both consciously and 'unconsciously'.

The evaluation has shown that the MDPA model and process is the outcome of strategic choices by Sida to enhance and formalise the focus on poverty reduction in Sida through a multidimensional poverty lens. As indicated above, the approach is well known, and it is being used to a relatively large extent.

Still, its influence on the strategic direction of Swedish aid and decision-making at country/embassy level is affected by overarching political and policy concerns by changing governments, competing strategies and other priorities at the level of implementation. The

evaluation has also shown that the MDPAs' findings do not always reach the strategy process.

However, through its effect on unit cohesion, joint learning and internalisation of the multidimensional understanding of poverty at the group level, the MDPA has an indirect effect on the structure of Swedish bilateral aid and for Sweden and Sida's continued focus on poverty reduction and multidimensional poverty.

Our review of MDPA reports and the MDPA framework indicates that the overall description of context and the dimensions of poverty are generally well done, a theoretical/analytical foundation for a convincing analysis of causal mechanisms required for the identification of binding constraints is missing. There are also limited options in the MDPA process for incorporating the type of grounded and participatory analysis required for the understanding of the perspective and agency of people living in poverty.

In the current situation, in which partner countries face a general reduction of development funds, the question of understanding and prioritising the groups most in need takes on extreme urgency. While being potentially useful, the MDPA model in its current form and application does not fully serve this purpose.

Recommendations

The recommendations depart from the conclusion that the MDPA should remain as an important part of fulfilling the main objective of Swedish development cooperation - to contribute to improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression.

However, the evaluation has identified a number of weaknesses and makes the following recommendations:

Develop a theory of change for the MDPA

The main recommendation is that Sida should revise or develop a detailed theory of change for how the MDPA instrument is intended to contribute to the objectives of Swedish development cooperation. It should include all intended outcomes, pathways and assumptions made for reaching this objective (e.g. input to strategy process as well as maintaining an overall focus on multidimensional poverty). The theory of change and the MDPA model should, at regular intervals, be reviewed to assess if changes are needed to strengthen the contribution to a continued focus by Sida on people living in poverty and under oppression in Sweden's countries of cooperation.

In addition, Sida should be explicit about the dual purpose of the MDPA. Placing more emphasis on the indirect way the MDPA influences decision-making could help build a stronger case and greater motivation for investing in the MDPA processes.

Clarify and integrate the use of MDPAs in Sida

To clarify and strengthen the impact of the MDPA, Sida could make more frequent and systematic use of key terminology of the MDPA framework in other parts of Sida's work, e.g. in reporting and planning systems.

Sida could also take initiatives to encourage mutual learning and discussions between Sida units at the headquarter (HQ) and embassies and between the latter. MDPAs should be easily accessible, and an internet-based discussion forum should be considered.

Using the MDPAs more systematically in communication with development partners, both in Sweden and in the countries of cooperation, would further strengthen the integration of MDPA terminology and understanding in Sida as well as with partners.

Revisit the format and role of the MDPA

As a result of developing the theory of change for the MDPA, Sida should review the MDPA model to maximise its potential impact and make it more useful for a continued focus on multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction within Swedish development cooperation. The evaluation team presents four modified versions of the MDPA as food for thought for Sida's continued work:

A first model (a “strengthened MDPA”) – based on the assumption that the MDPA should play a decisive role in fulfilling the overarching goal of contributing to improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppressions – would be to reinforce the position and role of the MDPA the strategy processes and for operational work. A revised MDPA, that should reflect the dynamics of poverty and poverty reduction and include actionable conclusions, should be compulsory to do for all Sweden's countries of cooperation.

A second model (a “downscaled MDPA”) could be to develop the MDPA into a more analytical, focused and simplified model that is less of a burden to apply for Sida and its staff. It should rely on a more limited range of international statistics and more on country-based quantitative and qualitative expertise and studies to make it into a more living document. The purpose should still be to contribute to a continued focus on the overarching goal of poverty reduction and inform the strategy process and operational work at country level.

A third model (“an operational MDPA”) would lessen the focus on generating input to the strategy process, and instead primarily see the MDPA as an instrument for operationalisation and possible follow-up of strategy decisions. In this model, no general MDPA would be performed. Instead, focus is on operationalisation and identification of target groups in the specific sectors identified in the strategy and to serve as instrument for achieving greater integration between the different sectors in which Sida is active.

And a fourth model (a “collective learning MDPA”) would emphasize the MDPA’s function for group learning, collective exchange and strategic discussion to a larger extent. In such a model, the MDPA is not primarily tied to steps in the strategy process but is rather seen as a constant tool for assessment and discussion of multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction. Hence, focus would shift from preparing reports and input to the strategy process to preparation and opportunities for constant joint discussion among the relevant strategy owners.

1 Background

1.1 The evaluation

Poverty reduction is a central objective of aid initiatives in low- and middle- income countries (World Bank 2024; United Nations 2024). While important strides towards poverty reduction have been made using different modalities, debates about poverty reduction policies and their accompanying measurements are lively. A unidimensional focus on income poverty has dominated debates for long but has been criticized for its exclusion of wider social and subjective components of well-being. Instead, multidimensional approaches have grown in popularity, typically measuring deprivation in standards of living, education and health (UNDP/OPHI, 2024; Alkire et al. 2023).

Reflecting a long-standing multidimensional perspective on poverty, the overarching goal of Swedish development cooperation is to contribute to “improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression” (Government of Sweden 2013). As of 2017, this perspective has been concretised in the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) by the development and use of the conceptual framework ‘Multidimensional Poverty Analysis’ (MDPA).

The framework reflects a view that poverty is multidimensional, and hence, its reduction requires a multifaceted approach. Based on analyses of the political, economic, security and environmental context and a focus on people living in poverty, Sida’s definition of poverty involves deprivation in resources as well as lack of human security, power and voice, and opportunities and choice.

Sida’s MDPA is among the most comprehensive frameworks for analysing poverty applied by official donor agencies and Sida has placed much emphasis on the MDPA as a tool for steering develop-

ment strategies and interventions. Still, as indicated in the Invitation for Proposals for this evaluation (EBA 2024b:3), the application of the model and the use of its results presents several challenges and ambiguities both at the political level of policies and strategies and for Sida's operational work. Hence, the evaluation aims at assessing how MDPA influences the overarching steering towards poverty reduction.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether, and to what extent, Swedish bilateral aid is consciously influenced and/or steered by multidimensional poverty analyses, and to assess how the MDPA influences the overarching steering towards poverty reduction (EBA 2024b:1,4). More specifically, there are three evaluation questions:

- Has the multidimensional 'view on poverty' been institutionalised, and are staff adhering to the MDPA model and process? Does the MDPA practice lead to consensus within Sida as to what constitutes poverty and effective measures to reduce poverty?
- What outcomes have the MDPA led to (in terms of visible outcomes as well as according to the perception among Sida staff)? Have the conducted analyses been practically useful for prioritising – select and deselect – sectors, directions, projects, or areas of work? Have other kinds of outcomes emerged?
- What lessons may be learned as to the merit and value of the MDPA instrument in consciously steering Swedish bilateral aid towards poverty reducing interventions?

The scope of the evaluation sets the main evaluation period to 2017 – 2024. All MDPAs shall be studied but that the focus shall be on bilateral contributions. The main users of the evaluation are staff and managers at Sida HQs and embassies who conduct and work with MDPA, as well as policymakers at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. (EBA 2024b:5)

The Invitation for Proposals highlights that the evaluation shall assess both the analyses made and the anchoring of the tool and

analyses within Sida. Examples of different areas of influence of MDPA are provided, indicating that the evaluation shall take a broad perspective when assessing outcomes.

1.2 Poverty, development and MDPA

The development of Sida's Multidimensional Poverty Analysis tool has taken place under changing circumstances. While global income poverty rates decreased from 38 percent in 1990 to 8.5 percent in 2024, progress has stalled since 2019 with the Covid pandemic as a turning point. Today, extreme income poverty is predominantly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and in fragile and conflict-affected regions. Approximately 3.5 billion people subsist on less than \$6.85 daily, highlighting persistent global inequality (World Bank, 2024, see OPHI/UNDP, 2024, for an overview of global multidimensional poverty).

Recent trends in global Official Development Assistance (ODA) reveal a complex landscape influenced by geopolitical shifts, increased humanitarian needs, and changing donor priorities, where ODA has also become increasingly politicised (EBA, 2025). From the point of view of many poor countries, development cooperation has become characterized by an enhanced focus on global challenges such as conflict, migration and climate and unpredictable funding (OPHI/UNDP, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Additionally, a significant portion of European development assistance is currently directed to Ukraine, to cover in-country refugee hosting costs, and sustaining infrastructure and government functions.

According to OECD/DAC, Sweden has long been at the forefront of international development cooperation and a focus on poverty reduction and multidimensional poverty, being known for "its robust programming and policies that allows it to demonstrate results and help communicate these" (OECD/DAC, 2024:2). The OECD/DAC peer review report notes that "as a global leader, Sweden has placed poverty reduction at the centre of its

development co-operation system. This is hardwired into the system through its multidimensional poverty analysis tools” (OECD/DAC, 2024:3)

Discussions about the meaning of poverty reduction have a long history in Sweden (see e.g. Carlsson 1998), and a multidimensional perspective has been present at least since the early 1960s when the Swedish Government stated that the goal of foreign aid was to increase the standard of living for people living in poverty. This was explained as eradicating starvation and mass poverty, eliminate epidemic diseases, reduce child mortality and to increase opportunities for decent living conditions.¹ (Government of Sweden, 1962). In 2003, the Policy for Global Development (Politik för Global Utveckling) was approved by the Swedish parliament (Felleson & Román, 2016). This policy made international development a responsibility for Swedish society and government at large. The efforts were to be guided by “the rights perspective” (relating to human rights conventions) and the “perspectives of the poor” in keeping with the global debates on poverty at that time. The Policy for Global Development has, until very recently, been valid and has been further developed towards increased focus on specified goals, such as Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals (Government of Sweden, 2024a).

In Sida, “Perspectives on Poverty”, a guiding document stressing that “poverty is dynamic, multi-dimensional and context specific” was published in 2002. The guidance noted that “[l]ack of power and choice and lack of material resources form the essence of poverty” (Sida, 2002:23). In turn, poverty was explained by conflict, lack of economic and social development, lack of democracy, and unsustainable use of the environment (Sida, 2002:8).

1 The original text states that: “Målet för biståndsgivningen är att höja de fattiga folkens levnadsnivå. Konkret innebär detta att avskaffa svälten och massfattigdomen, att eliminera de epidemiska sjukdomarna, att minska barnadödligheten och över huvud skapa möjligheter till drägliga levnadsvillkor.”

The following year, an internal guide for contribution management at Sida (2003:28f) instructed staff to assess contribution relevance by means of a “multidimensional poverty analysis”. Over time, the introduction of new perspectives (conflict, gender equality, and environment and climate) to complement the rights perspective and the perspective of people living in poverty would add substance to the model. Such perspectives were practically applied in several multidisciplinary studies related to programmes and projects and studies seeing poverty from the perspective of people living in poverty (Tvedten et al., 2015).

In 2017, these elements were brought together in the concept paper “Dimensions of Poverty” as a general reference for how Sida “understands multidimensional poverty and as a basic structure for a multidimensional poverty analysis” (Sida, 2017). The creation of the MDPA as an analytical framework was followed by a number of thematic publications through Sida’s Poverty Toolbox.

In parallel with these developments, the Swedish Government elected in 2023 initiated a reorientation of Swedish development policy (EBA 2025). The reform agenda, “Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth”, stresses the role of economic actors and commercial exchange in development cooperation, while introducing certain new themes (migration in particular) in the Swedish development discourse (Government of Sweden, 2023). The budget proposition for 2025 discontinues the Policy for Global Development and hence the perspectives on poverty introduced in 2013 and does not contain references to a multidimensional poverty perspective (Government of Sweden, 2025).

However, the overall objective of Swedish development cooperation remains to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression. Furthermore, prioritised

thematic areas of the reform agenda to some extent overlap with the perspectives from 2013.²

1.3 Multidimensional poverty indices

The study of poverty was since the mid-20th century dominated by economic and monetary approaches, but such methods were increasingly criticized due to their focus on income and consumption to the exclusion of wider social and subjective components of wellbeing (Laderchi, Saith & Stewart, 2003).

The economist Amartya Sen developed the ‘capability approach’ in the 1980s, emphasising the importance of individuals’ capabilities and freedoms. He argued that poverty should be viewed as a lack of basic capabilities rather than just a lack of income and consumption, which laid the groundwork for multidimensional poverty concepts (Sen, 1983).

In the early years of this millennium, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Alkire & Santos, 2014; OPHI/UNDP, 2024). It measures poverty by assessing deprivations in the dimensions of health, education, and living standards, and considers various indicators, such as child mortality, years of schooling, and access to clean water. While being a descriptive index, the MPI is used to inform policy and decision-making and hence has normative and analytical value.

The MPI gained recognition as a valuable tool for assessing and addressing poverty on a global scale, although not without controversy

2 More explicitly, the priorities in the new agenda are: 1) Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education. 2) Improved health for the most vulnerable. 3) Promoting freedom and fighting oppression. 4) Expanded and more effective climate aid. 5) Strengthening women’s and girls’ freedom and empowerment. 6) Strengthened synergies between development assistance and migration policy. 7) Enhanced humanitarian assistance to save lives and alleviate suffering (Government of Sweden, 2023).

among researchers and practitioners.³ At the same time, a wealth of new measurements and indices of social and political phenomena became available during these years, facilitating measurement and follow-up of development factors from press freedom and control of corruption to effective governance and educational attainment.

Many countries and organisations began adopting multidimensional poverty measures to complement traditional income-based metrics.⁴ Since then, there have been continued efforts to refine and adapt multidimensional poverty measures to various contexts, including the development of national poverty indices that base the measurement of poverty on specific local needs and priorities and in combination with studies from other disciplines using different approaches and types of data.

Sida's approach to multidimensional poverty analysis differs from other multidimensional measures by not being an index and with its ambition to be an all-encompassing or holistic model. The model also aspires to analyse and identify the causes of poverty.

The relative merits of the MPI and similar models on the one hand, and the MDPA on the other, rest on their different purposes. The former are focused on important proxies for poverty and poverty reduction, lend themselves to global statistical comparisons and analyses and can be used as elements in broader analyses of the context and dynamics of poverty and poverty alleviation. The MDPA model seeks to encompass the structural context, the characteristics of poverty and the identification of the poor, into one model as basis for poverty reduction policies and interventions. The ultimate utility of

3 Ravallion (2011), for example, argued that one should aim for a credible set of multiple indices rather than a single multidimensional index. Partial aggregation would still be necessary, but ideally the weights should be consistent with well-informed choices by poor people.

4 In addition to OPHI and UNDP (the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, MPI), aid organisation using multidimensional poverty analyses in their work include World Bank (Poverty and shared prosperity series), UNICEF (Multi-indicator Cluster Surveys, MICS), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

the models for poor people as the ultimate target group depends on how well they are done and implemented, which is what this evaluation intends to assess for the MDPA

Even though government documents now lack references to the multidimensional perspective on poverty (Government of Sweden 2024a), the concept still has a central place in Sida's contributions to the development of country and other strategies and identification of priorities. And while the methods and forms may have changed, the basic substantial tenets of the model, the dimensions and contextual factors to be assessed, remain largely unaltered.

The report proceeds with presenting the approach and methodology applied in the evaluation. Next, the evaluation object is presented in more detail (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 present findings on the MDPA reports and processes, and use and effects, respectively. Chapters 6 to 8 analyse the findings and respond to the three evaluation questions about and institutionalisation, outcomes and steering of Swedish bilateral aid, respectively. Chapter 9 concludes, and Chapter 10 presents a few recommendations.

2 Approach and Methodology

This is an evaluation of an analytical framework and its application, and if and how this has affected Swedish aid – or, in terms of OECD/DAC criteria, the relevance and impact of the MDPA. The evaluation questions ask about institutionalisation and consensus within Sida, and outcomes and use of MDPA findings, and how these relate to the MDPA. This is in line with the main operative purpose of the MDPA, which focuses on the relevance rather than the effectiveness or efficiency of Sida's contribution portfolio (Sida, 2017). Accordingly, we will not attempt to assess effects on poverty reduction per se.

Instead, what follows is an assessment of the process, content, relevance and use of MDPAs as well as of various types of outcomes they (may) have resulted in, including both visible effects on Swedish bilateral aid and more abstract effects on e.g. how Sida staff understands poverty and poverty alleviation. For this reason, the evaluation has applied a mix of different approaches and methods.

The evaluation is framed by a theory-based approach combined with light touch contribution analysis and draws on Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of structured social spaces to explain interaction between organisational units and individuals. This approach has enabled the team to reach evidence-based findings and develop conclusions on the evaluation questions.

A theory of change was developed by the evaluation team, based on initial document review during the inception phase. It provides an overall framework for the analysis and for assessing if and how the MDPA has contributed to outcomes in terms of steering Swedish aid and promoting a multidimensional view on poverty. The theory of change has allowed the team to take a structured approach to concepts such as institutionalisation and steering and has guided the development of data collection tools.

A simplified version of the theory of change is presented in Chapter 3; a refined version that reflects data collected during the evaluation in Chapter 7. The theory of change aims to illustrate the various intended results of the MDPA (both tangible and abstract) as well as underlying assumptions.

A simplified version of contribution analysis⁵ was applied to assess the extent to which, and how, the MDPA has contributed to outcomes. This included collecting and analysing data to test the assumptions and results in the theory of change, and to present a revised version of it. This enabled us to assess the logic of the theory of change and draw conclusions about if the MDPA has contributed to change and how.

The Invitation for Proposals emphasises institutionalisation, conscious steering, anchoring and consensus within Sida. We interpret this as a request to analyse the extent to which structures, rules, norms and practices – such as the process of producing MDPAs – become established and accepted as legitimate within an organisation (see e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977 and Scott 2015). This goes beyond a simple analysis of the number and content of MDPAs and has required us to collect information about perceptions and understandings of the concept, as well as of their practical implications.

As an overall ‘good-to-think-with’ framework for analysis of the institutionalisation and outcomes of Sida’s MDPA approach, we relate to Bourdieu’s (1990, see also Robinson et al., 2021) notion of *fields* or ‘structured social spaces’ that can help explain how different organizational units and actors interact, compete and cooperate for common purposes (such as the MDPAs) within a structured environment (such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)/Sida):

5 Mayne, J. 2001. Addressing attribution through contribution analysis: using performance measures sensibly. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 16: 1-24. For a more recent reference and other sources, please see Frans L. Leeuw. (2023) John Mayne and Rules of Thumb for Contribution Analysis: A Comparison with Two Related Approaches. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 37:3, 403-421.

The overall *political field*, where decisions and priorities of the Swedish Government/MFA on development cooperation priorities – including the role of poverty reduction – are made. This includes changes in global/Swedish ODA priorities and the current government's Reform Agenda.

Sida's *organisational fields* – from its Sida headquarter (HQ)/management, via its specialised units (such as the Chief Economist Team) to Swedish embassies in countries of cooperation – where development/poverty reduction policies are concretised in the form of MDPAs, country Strategies, development portfolios, contributions etc.

Within and between these fields, habits, skills, dispositions and ways of thinking (*habitus*) are internalised and reproduced. Different forms of *capital* (authority, knowledge, relations etc.) among and between groups and individuals help explain different outcomes of the MDPAs in the interphase between structural/organisational processes and human agency/'champions'. The latter refers to individuals or entities within an organisation who actively promote, support and drive forward a specific policy or agenda – such as the MDPA.

This will help explain the relative importance of each field and the role/agency of Sida staff for the extent to which the decision to apply MDPAs lead to the intended impact as expressed in the theory of change: That Sida staff internalise and reproduce the MDP approach as an institutional norm and practice and that Sida's contributions become more relevant for poverty reduction as a result of this.

The team has had meetings with the Chief Economist Team during the inception and analysis phases of the evaluation to get their view on the MDPA, and reaction to preliminary findings, respectively. Data collection tools (interviews, group interviews/discussions and survey) have been designed to provide scope for broader reflection and elaboration on the MDPA and views on poverty and poverty reduction.

The evaluation combines document review of a majority of MDPA reports and relevant background and contribution documents with in-depth studies of a selection of case-study countries (see Chapter 2.2) to provide data on how MDPAs have been carried out and used, as well as if and how MDPAs influence Sida and embassy planning and programming and are used in Sida's dialogue with partners and government. The case studies also capture other, unpredicted, effects of the MDPAs.

2.1 Data collection methods

The team applied a mix of different methods to collect data, consisting of document review, interviews, and an online survey.

Document review included review of supporting materials in Sida's Poverty Toolbox, systematic review and scoring of a majority of MDPA reports and presentations, systematic review of documents from a stratified sample of randomly selected contributions in the case countries (appraisal memos and conclusions on performance), strategy reports, and more, see Annex 2 (all annexes online).

The team has reviewed and scored reports for 43 out of the 49 MDPAs that were identified, the rest of the reports were missing or were minor updates of earlier MDPAs. Based on the information provided in the reports, the process and quality of the analysis of key components of the MDPA tool (who is poor, how they are poor and why) was assessed and scored from 1 (very poor or non-existent) to 5 (excellent). Brief comments were provided to motivate/explain the score. The scoring tool and quantitative data are presented in Annexes 3.2 and 4.2, respectively.

A stratified randomised sample of appraisal memos and conclusions on performance for six contributions for each case country was identified to assess the extent of reference to and coherence with MDPAs. A list of these documents is presented in Annex 2.

Interviews were carried out with staff at Sida HQ and with staff at the embassies in the selected case countries. Three of the case study countries were also visited (Bangladesh, Kenya, Liberia) which allowed for a broader coverage, including interviews with a larger number of staff members, partners and other development actors. For the other three case countries (Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Moldova and Mozambique), interviews were done digitally, covering a smaller number of interviews. For a list of interviewees, see Annex 1).

In total, 88 persons were interviewed, the majority individually but some in small groups and some were interviewed more than once. 60 percent of the interviewees were women. 60 percent of the interviews were conducted in person, the rest online. A list of interviewees is available in Annex 1. The interviews loosely followed an interview guide, presented in Annex 3.4. Of the interviewees, 12 work at the Sida HQ in Stockholm, 41 work at Swedish embassies, 4 at EU delegations, 2 at the Swedish MFA, and 29 at other organisations, including government ministries, academia, NGOs, other donors, etc. Interviews with Sida/MFA staff working with the case countries included 11 interviewees for Liberia, 8 for Bangladesh, 7 for the DRC, 6 for Kenya, 5 for Mozambique, and 4 for Moldova.

A survey was distributed to gather information from a broader set of respondents on issues related to implementation, use and institutionalisation of MDPA. The survey targeted all Sida staff at embassies involved in managing Swedish Development Cooperation, as well as members of the analyst network at Sida. The survey did not target other Sida HQ staff, as the added value of this was not assessed to merit the cost in terms of staff time. As Sida was not allowed to share staff email addresses with the evaluation team, the survey invitation was sent by the Chief Economist Team to the Sida analyst network and to the heads of cooperation at 35 embassies, with a request that they forward it to other staff at their embassy. There were 49 responses to the survey, representing 22 embassies. The exact response rate cannot be calculated, as we do not have information

about how many received the survey invitation. The survey questions and quantitative data (including background data on gender, role, time at Sida etc.) are presented in Annex 4.6.

Interviewees were asked for permission to have their names in the list of interviewees, and all agreed to this. Both interviewees and survey respondents were informed that the information they shared would not be presented in a way that would reveal the source. For this reason, quotes have been anonymised and references to interview data has been kept a bit vague. We use the terms “a few” or “some” to indicate a small minority of respondents, “several” indicate a large minority, “the majority” indicate that the answer featured in more than half of the relevant conversations, and “most” that nearly all had the same viewpoint. When something was only mentioned in a singular interview or in only one of the case study countries, that is clearly indicated.

2.2 Sampling

The team identified six countries for in-depth study. The selection aimed at a broad representation based on a number of criteria, such as MDPA process, geographic areas, country poverty characteristics, Sida’s role, etc. The countries and criteria applied are presented in Annex 3.1.

For each case country, six contributions were randomly selected for review. Contributions listed in Open-aid⁶ were picked randomly (with the help of a random number generator) one after another. Only contributions started 2023 or earlier, still active and with a budget below SEK 5 million were included, to ensure relevance and availability of data, and no more than two contributions per thematic area were included. A list of the sampled contributions is available in

⁶ www.openaid.se.

Annex 4.5. Note that the team could not access full documentation for all sampled contributions.

Interviewees were identified and selected in four ways:

- For case countries, the team interviewed staff involved in making or using MDPAs (sent-out and national staff). For those countries that were visited, partners and government representatives were also interviewed.
- Suggestion from Chief Economist Team of persons that they identified as relevant for the team to interview. The team selected which of these to interview, based on availability and role, and to ensure not only interviewees recommended by the Chief Economist Team were interviewed.
- Department and Unit Heads identified on Sida's webpage. A majority of these were contacted, interviewees were decided mainly by availability and to avoid overlap with roles of other interviewees.
- Snowballing, by asking interviewees for other relevant persons to interview.

2.3 Analysis

Several analysis methods were applied: Survey data has been compiled and analysed using the survey engine's tools. Document review data has been compiled and analysed using Excel. Interview data has been collated and triangulated, first by each interviewer and then in discussions within the evaluation team. Data from different methods and sources was compared (triangulated) and differences highlighted as part of the analysis. The data has been assessed against the theory of change, and support for assumptions and results noted as part of the analysis of how and to what the MDPAs have contributed. The analysis took place individually by team members, in several online meetings and in a three-day team analysis workshop

in Stockholm. Tentative findings were presented, validated and discussed in an online meeting with the Chief Economist Team.

2.4 Ethical considerations

All persons interviewed have given explicit permission to have their names presented in the list of interviews. When interviews have been recorded, this has been after permission of the interviewee. Both interview and survey respondents were ensured that all comments shared shall be presented without revealing the source, hence, quotes have been anonymised. The survey responses were provided via a weblink, with no email addresses revealed to the team.

2.5 Limitations

We interpret this to be an evaluation of an analytical concept and tool and its application, and if and how this has affected Swedish aid – that is, the quality, relevance and results of the MDPA as such. We have not attempted to assess effects on poverty reduction per se.

As instructed by the Invitation for Proposals, the study is limited to bilateral aid. The evaluation scope does not include Sida contributions that are executed through multilateral aid and global programmes, and no explicit attempt has been made to assess how the MDPA affects these. However, as will be noted, one of the effects of the MDPA is the understanding of and attention to multidimensional poverty among Sida staff, and this way there may be ‘spillover effects’ on the management of global programmes.

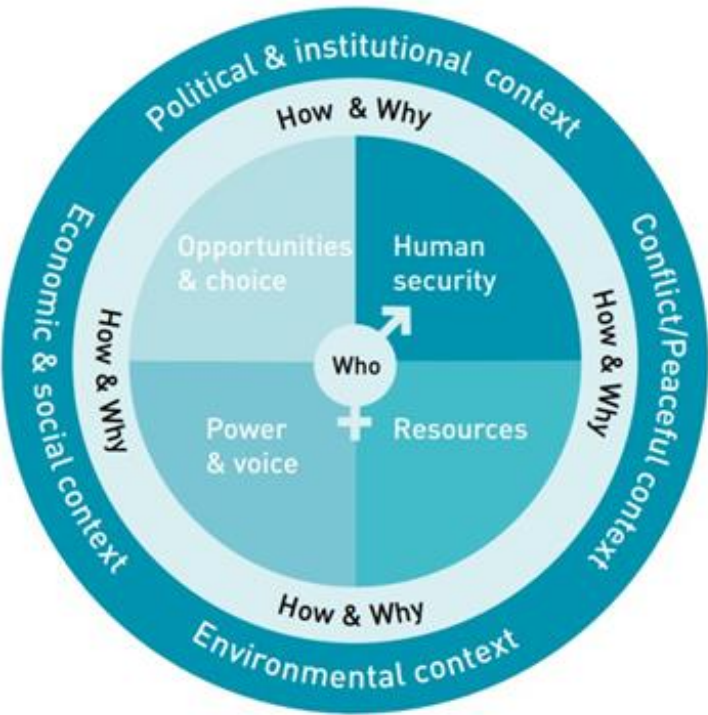
The evaluation has been carried out during a period of intensive change at Sida. This has affected the evaluation team’s ability to access interviewees, especially at Sida HQ. However, the various sources and methods for collecting data do not indicate that this has affected the validity of data.

A substantial share of MDPAs have been published during the recent years and have not yet had much time to have effect. This limits the possibility to trace effects of these MDPAs. The recent changes in the MDPA format are also not feasible to trace in other documents. This has been compensated by adding interview and survey questions on the matter.

3 Multidimensional Poverty Analysis – the approach and model

The object of this evaluation is Sida’s model for multidimensional poverty analysis. The emphasis of the model is on four contextual conditions affecting the poor, four dimensions of poverty and on the identification of who the poor are (see Figure 1). The figure below visualises these and the three basic questions the analysis seeks to answer (Sida/Chief Economist Team, 2024a:1): Who is poor? How is poverty experienced by different groups? And why are people living in poverty?

Figure 1: Multidimensional poverty analysis in Sida



To analyse **how** people are poor, the MDPA identifies four dimensions that capture the main ways in which poverty manifests itself: (i) Resources, (ii) Opportunities and Choice, (iii) Power and Voice, and (iv) Human Security. According to Sida, a person living in multidimensional poverty is resource poor and poor in at least one additional dimension.

To understand **why** people are poor, the MDPA analyses four development contexts that are often outside of the influence of an individual, but which frame the set of choices and opportunities available to people living in poverty. The four development contexts that are used in the MDPA to analyse the underlying causes of poverty are: (i) Economic and Social, (ii) Political and Institutional, (iii) Conflict and Peaceful, and (iv) the Environment.

The core question of **who** is living in poverty is responded to either as a point of departure for the continued analysis, or as a finding based on the analysis of how and why people are poor. The identification of who is living in poverty is mainly done by presenting statistics of different aspects of poverty, e.g. income level and access to education, across different groups, e.g. women, children, rural population and ethnic minorities.

Prior to 2023, the concluding section of an MDPA should present conclusions on the three questions above. In 2023, a requirement to identify ‘binding constraints’ was added (Sida/Chief Economist Team, 2024a). Binding constraints are defined as “the key development challenges that severely restrict the potential for sustained poverty reduction and if they were to be addressed successfully, would produce the largest gains in terms of poverty reduction for the identified target groups” (Sida, 2024b:13). It is emphasised that it is important to differentiate between constraints that can be addressed by development cooperation efforts and those that cannot.

The importance of the binding constraints has been further bolstered by recent developments at Sida. It is now planned that the identification of Sweden’s comprehensive ‘development offers’ –

meant to provide a structure for enhanced coordination and follow-up between Sida's different strategies – shall rest heavily on the binding constraints (Sida, 2024e:4f). One of the main inputs to the development of such offers will be “un-preconditioned, data- and evidence-based” multidimensional poverty analyses leading to the identification of binding constraints to which Sida's offer can be directed (Sida, 2024e:4).

The process of implementing an MDPA generally involves a period of data collection and analysis, by individuals or in group, analysis of the data and identification of conclusions or binding constraints in group discussions, and write-up of the report by one or a few individuals.

To support the process, instructions for applying the MDPA analytical framework have been communicated through methodological guidelines (Sida, 2017b, 2018b and 2024b), as well as a number of thematic publications. These include: Perspectives of people living in poverty (Sida, 2020b), Environment and climate change (Sida, 2019), Gender equality (Sida, 2020c), Fragility, conflicts and crisis (Sida, 2022b), Migration and displacement (Sida, 2023a) and Market systems development (Sida, 2021). In addition, Sida's Chief Economist Team has produced more practical guides including “How to Plan MDPA”, “How to Analyse MDPA”, and “How to Use MDPA” (Sida/Chief Economist Team, 2023a, 2023b, and 2024b, respectively).

The MDPA guidelines provide guiding questions to be used in the analysis. While the original guidelines from 2017 were relatively open and flexible, they later became more streamlined and today draws heavily on centrally provided data. A large number of links to data sets (mainly international and quantitative) are provided: the total number of links under ‘Dimensions of Poverty’ is 111, and under ‘The development Context’ 121 (Sida 2024e). The guidelines encourage the use of national data where available, but there is no explicit request to combine quantitative with qualitative data and analyses.

In terms of analytical approach, the most recent guide (Sida 2024a) asks the reader to start by identifying who is living in poverty and the main deprivations they face, and then analyse the economic, political, security and environmental structures (or ‘context’ and ‘binding constraints’) that keep the identified groups in poverty.

As for the question of **who** is living in poverty and the main deprivations that they face, the guides’ advice is to start by looking at the national poverty levels, reflect on which groups are particularly vulnerable and use international databases complemented by locally available data sources and analysis for further identification. According to the guide, “a person living in multidimensional poverty is resource poor and poor in at least one additional dimension”. This implies a theoretical/analytical standpoint but is not explained any further.

The original emphasis on the ‘perspectives of people living in poverty’ was toned down in later guidelines (Sida 2017b versus 2024b). There are short references in the 2024 version to perspectives of people living in poverty (“What type of resources do people living in poverty think is the most important for them? What are their coping strategies in case of shock?”) – but no guidelines as to how this may be done and used in the analysis.

3.1 Some notes on the MDPA model

Overall, the team finds Sida’s MDPA *model* to be holistic, comprehensive and potentially useful to identify the dynamics of multidimensional poverty and poverty alleviation. As broadly outlined, the model compares well with other analyses of structural oppression and the situation of people living in poverty. These include Giddens’ (1984) ‘Structuration Theory’; Bourdieu’s (1990) ‘Theory of Practise’; and various approaches to ‘political economies’.

At the same time, the model is conceptually broad, complex – and time-consuming to apply. Such a broad and all-encompassing model

makes sense in a world that is increasingly complex – also for the poor. It also reflects the overarching goal of Swedish development cooperation of contributing to improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression and could therefore be an important point of reference and tool for maintaining such a focus.

As noted in Chapter 1.3, Sida's MDPA differs from many other multidimensional analyses by aspiring to not only describe poverty but also explain its occurrence and identify its causes. However, the MDPA does not contain an explicit theoretical framework (of 'change', 'drivers of poverty' or other dimensions) as is common in the poverty reduction approaches and theories that seem to be reflected in the MDPA model – such as economic growth, human capital development, empowerment and participation, sustainable development and social protection (see also Ravallion 2016). Instead, the MDPA model has an empirical and inductive approach to combine and analyse the data collected.

There are several challenges with the MDPA model applied by Sida: The first is that the MDPA model seems best suited for descriptive quantitative exercises, and less so for providing valid explanations or causal mechanisms for the observed phenomena in the analysis. The variables in the model and the data to be used are too diverse to establish a coherent theoretical framework and employ statistical analyses.

Secondly, the model lacks an analytical component to assess the relation between structural (or binding) constraints and the identified people living in poverty and their agency – making it difficult to identify the *main drivers* of change. An alternative would be to start the analysis with the structural/binding constraints and their impact on the distribution and depth of poverty and *then* assess the nature of poor peoples' deprivations.

Thirdly, the model is largely based on statistical representations of poverty and the poor from an outsider's (*etic*) perspective and seems to lack a focus on human agency, social relations and peoples' own

(*emic*) perspectives (Jones and Tvedten 2019). While the model presents poverty as being largely determined by structural forces and oppression, understanding poor people's social relations (of power, class, gender, ethnicity etc.) and their agency is vital for relating to their options for social mobility.

Fourthly, the dependence on quantitative datasets for defining who is living in poverty and the deprivations they face runs the risk of defining broad social and demographic categories instead of identifying the groups that are most in need and presenting the poor as passive 'victims' of oppression. A more systematic use of qualitative studies would facilitate a more specific identification of target groups – who they are, their social position, geographical location, and their perspectives and agency.

And finally, while there is ample guidance on what questions to ask and where to find data when implementing an MDPA, it is less clear how it will actually contribute to its objective – to contribute to maintaining the relevance of Swedish development aid. This is the topic of the next section.

3.2 Theory of change for Sida's MDPA

When the MDPA was launched in 2017, its overall objective was stated to be to “ensure the continued relevance of Sida's contribution portfolio given how poverty is manifested and experienced, who is poor, in what dimensions, the underlying causes of poverty, risks and vulnerability” – and among its main goals was to provide inputs into the formulation, operationalisation and annual follow up of the strategy process (Sida, 2017:21; see also Sida 2018).

Development strategies guide the implementation of Swedish development cooperation (National Audit Office, 2024:27f). In these documents, which normally cover five-year periods, thematic priorities are indicated along with corresponding objectives and other goals which the strategy shall serve.

Under the umbrella of the overarching goal of poverty reduction defined by the Swedish parliament, the Swedish Government formulates these strategies, on the basis of, among other factors, previous results, experiences and analyses.

Until very recently (Government of Sweden 2024b), the government instructions for the strategy process emphasised that conclusions from a multidimensional poverty analysis should feature in the inputs that Sida contributes to the process (Government of Sweden, 2017). Likewise, Sida's own documents refer to the performance of an MDPA as "an integral part of its strategy cycle". Hence, the MDPA shall be used as input to the in-depth strategy report which, in turn provides input to the government's strategy formulation.

However, while the purpose of the MDPA is fairly clear, there is no clear description of how it is intended to achieve its purpose. Instructions and guidelines cover the analytical process but apart from the instruction that it shall be used in the strategy process, there is little guidance on how the MDPA shall be operationalised, followed up or contribute to its objectives at large. The closest to guidelines for operationalisation of MDPA findings is an internal review from 2024 which lists aspects that can be strengthened to support operationalisation (Sida/Chief Economist Team, 2024b). However, it does so without presenting a plan or overall picture of the pathway from MDPA to steering aid at strategy or implementation levels.

As the evaluation has not been able to find a description of how the MDPA is intended to contribute to understanding and steering towards poverty reduction, a tentative theory of change was developed by the team. It is based on information collected by the evaluation and attempts to capture the different ways that the MDPA is intended to contribute to impact. It should not be seen as an official theory of change, nor as being developed by Sida.

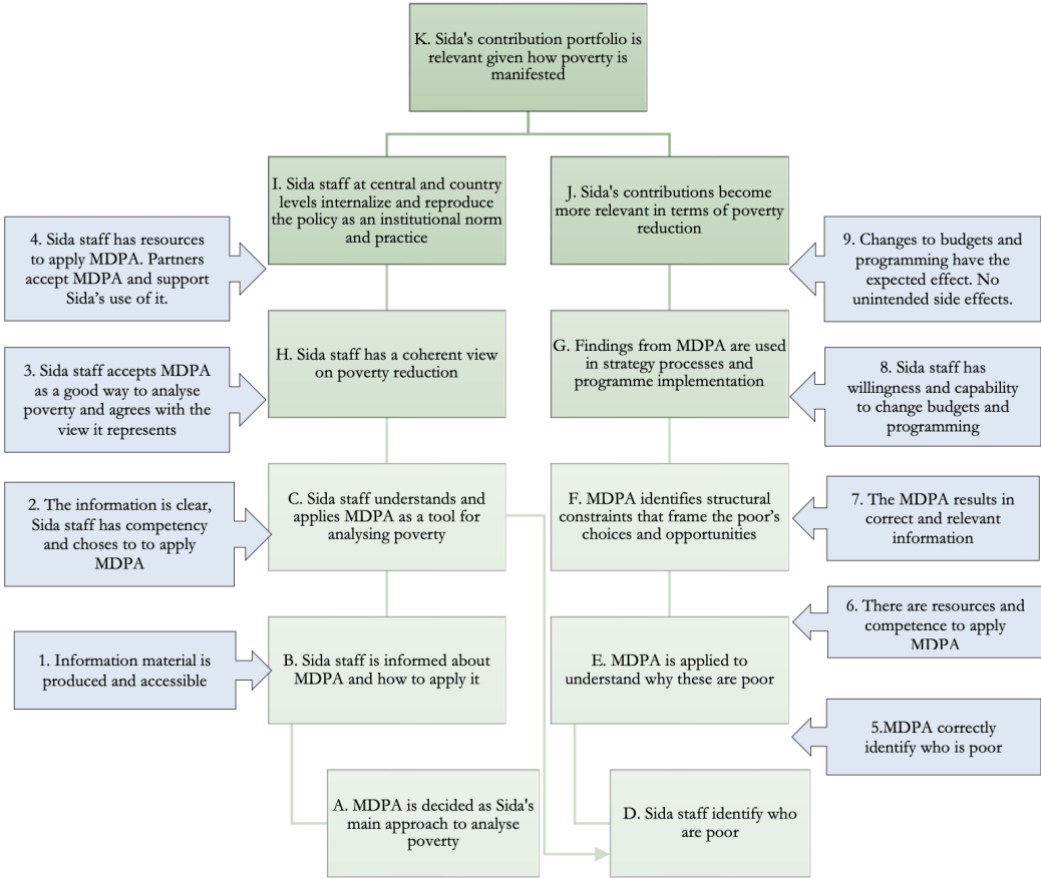
The short version of the tentative theory of change is that, on the one hand, the MDPA is formally required to be used as input to the strategy process, for reporting on strategies and for contribution

management. On the other hand, the MDPA is described as a tool for understanding and analysing poverty. The Chief Economist Team has repeatedly stated that the process is important in itself. Interviewees have emphasised the MDPA's role of increasing the understanding of Sida's view on multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction, and as a way of keeping poverty on the agenda. Eventually, both these aspects – steering and understanding - intend to ensure that Swedish development cooperation is relevant with regards to poverty. Hence, the figure below includes two different pathways for change – the right side showing the more direct effects on steering (formal) and the left one capturing the more 'informal' and less tangible effects.

The green boxes illustrate intended effects (immediate results, outcomes and impact) on Sida staff (to the left) and on Sida's contributions (to the right). The blue boxes outline assumptions that need to be fulfilled for these effects to be realised. Note that in this simplified version partners, contexts, recipient governments etc. are not included. The results chains and assumptions illustrated in the figure are described and assessed in detail in Chapter 7, where a revised theory of change is also presented.

The first two green boxes (A and B) and assumption 1 have been touched upon in this chapter, and will also be covered in Chapter 4, which focuses on the bottom six green boxes, i.e. the implementation of the MDPA (Green boxes A to F, assumptions 1 to 7). Chapter 5 assesses the use and effects of the MDPAs for professional cohesion, in the strategy and portfolio management processes, and for partner communication (Green boxes G and H, assumption 3 and 8). Chapter 6 presents findings and discusses the extent to which the MDPA has been institutionalised in Sida (Green boxes C, H, I and assumptions 3 and 4). Chapter 7 revisits this Theory of change to assess the outcomes the MDPA (Green boxes J and K, assumption 9). Chapter 8 sums up the merit and value of the MDPA model, based on the findings presented, and Chapters 9 and 10 present conclusions and recommendations.

Figure 2: Tentative theory of change for MDPA in Sida



4 MDPAs reports and processes

The phrase ‘MDPA’ is used to refer to both MDPAs reports (the “products”) and the process of applying the framework to collect and analyse data (the “process”). In this chapter we first introduce the MDPAs reports and assess their quality, and then present findings on the processes applied to produce them.

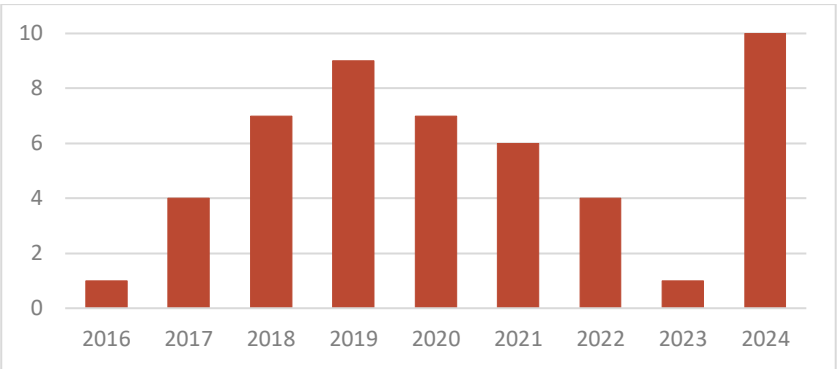
The data on MDPAs reports has been collected from material provided by the Chief Economist Team at Sida, searches on Sida’s webpage and via requests to Sida units at embassies to share reports (some in draft format). The assessment of report quality was made by the team, using a standardised scoring tool (presented in Annex 3.2). Information on the MDPAs process was collected by the evaluation team in interviews with Sida staff at case country embassies and via a survey targeting all Sida units at embassies managing Swedish development funds.

4.1 MDPAs reports

The Chief Economist Team at Sida emphasises that it has been voluntary to do an MDPAs and that the process is intentionally flexible, but at the same time the MDPAs have been intended to feed into the strategy process and will play an important role in development offers. The review of MDPAs reports shows that MDPAs are carried out, but not in all countries. It also shows that the MDPAs process, quality, and mode of presentation varies considerably.

The evaluation team has identified a total of 49 MDPAs, carried out between 2016 and 2024 (see Annex 4:1). In addition, several MDPAs are being revisited or done in the spring of 2025. As illustrated in Figure 3, there is a large variation in the number of MDPAs per year:

Figure 3: Number of MDPAs per year (2016 - 2024)



The first MDPA was implemented as a pilot in 2016. This was followed by a steady increase in the number of MDPAs per year until 2020, when the trend turned downwards again, followed by a sharp increase in 2024. The pattern shows alignment to the five-year strategy cycle, with many bilateral strategies being renewed in 2020/21 and a large number coming to an end in 2025, and the need to prepare MDPAs as input to the formation of new strategies.⁷ In addition, in 2025 there is a general request to update MDPAs in preparation for preparing the recently introduced development offers.

Sida's webpage⁸ lists 52 countries that receive development and/or humanitarian support. For 20 of these, the team has not been able to identify any MDPA report or presentation. This number includes some recently added countries or minor recipients, such as Armenia, and some countries that mainly receive humanitarian aid. However, MDPAs are missing also for a few major long-term cooperation countries with bilateral strategies, such as Somalia, whose bilateral strategy runs from 2018-2025 and hence covers nearly the whole period since the MDPA was introduced, and Ukraine, with a bilateral strategy for 2023-2027 but in rather special circumstances.

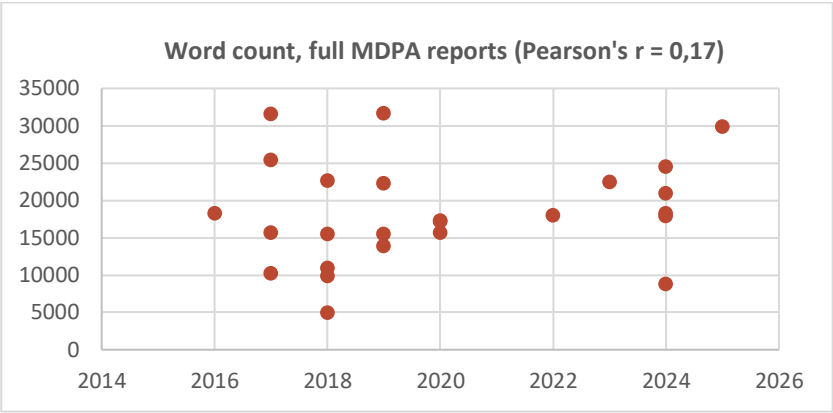
⁷ See <https://www.sida.se/en/about-sida/how-we-are-governed>.

⁸ <https://www.sida.se/sida-i-varlden/lander-och-regioner> [14 April 2025].

For the remaining countries, there are one or more MDPAs reports; 18 of the countries had done one MDPAs during the nine-year period, 11 had made 2 MDPAs and 3 countries had produced 3 MDPAs each. Note that updates, which ranged from mere amendment of recent data to fully renewed analyses, are included in the numbers above.

MDPA reports come in different sizes and shapes. The earlier MDPAs were often in the form of full reports. A simple word count reveals a wide variation in length of the full MDPAs reports, ranging from less than 5,000 to over 30,000 words. Over time there is a slight tendency for the full MDPAs reports to be longer, indicated by a positive (but weak) correlation between year and length illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Length of MDPAs reports over time



Lately, shorter updates and PowerPoint versions have become more frequent as a way to present the results of the analysis. Interviews in the case study countries indicate that the short final power point presentations may be based on substantial analytical work and 'back-ground' reports. The MDPAs in Mozambique and Kenya, both with the latest report still in draft form, are good examples of the two modes of presentation:

Mozambique MDPAs

The 2019 Mozambique MDPA (Sida 2019b) was largely prepared by embassy staff. It relates to the (then relatively open) MDPA guidelines by starting with the “why”, continuing with the “how”, and containing a limited section on the “who” of poverty. The 29-page report reads well, combining descriptive analysis with tables of key data – but is not specific on conclusions and implications of the analysis (which was not called for at the time).

The 2025 Mozambique MDPA (Sida 2024h, draft), prepared for the new strategy report in 2026, is essentially an update of the 2019 version—though it lacks the quantitative data tables, it includes a final section on binding constraints. Both former and current embassy staff generally hold positive views of the MDPA processes and their role in fostering staff cohesion – but acknowledge that it is time consuming.

Kenya MDPAs

The 2018 Kenya MDPA (Shepard and Dwakar, 2018) was produced by an external poverty expert. While it provided a thorough analysis of poverty consistent with the MDPA guide, it contained few direct references to poverty reduction and Sida and has seen limited use in strategy and operational work (earning it the nickname ‘the Black Swan’).

The 2024 Kenya MDPA process was carried out by embassy staff in cooperation with Chief Economist Team (Sida 2024i). Drawing on extensive data collection, workshops, a field visit, and partner engagement, the MDPA is presented in PowerPoint format. Support for the process at the embassy was not uniform. Common complaints were that it was too time-consuming and that data for Kenya were already readily available—though the positive impact on team cohesion was acknowledged.

4.1.1 The quality of MDPA reports

The evaluation team has reviewed all MDPA reports that it could get access to and scored 43 of them (the rest being e.g. updates of statistics in older MDPA reports). The quality of MDPA reports was assessed on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 5 being highest quality) on several variables covering the different parts of the MDPA model. The scoring tool is presented in Annex 3.2, the data in Annex 4.2.

The average quality was lowest on the variables “People’s own perspectives on poverty” (average quality score 2.22) and “Presenting clear conclusions on aspects that can be affected by Sida’s interventions” (average 2.54). The quality was highest on the presentation of the Resource dimension (average score 3.76) and Economic and social context (average score 3.80). Overall, the quality was low on conclusions, including “Conclusions on binding constraints for poverty reduction” (average 3.02). The low scores on these criteria indicate that the MDPA model, as applied, is not very good at putting the perspectives of people living in poverty in the forefront and may not be very useful for steering aid. This is in line with the challenges inherent in the model as discussed in Chapter 3.

The scores on variables relating to the methodology used to perform MDPAs varied. In reports where the sources of data were presented, evidence was largely collected from a broad range of relevant sources. However, several reports did not provide the source of the information. While a large share of the reports mainly presented statistics to describe the dimensions and context, some performed deeper analysis of the data they presented and some of the later reports altogether focused on presenting findings without showing how these were arrived at.

Figure 5: Quality of the analysis of who is poor

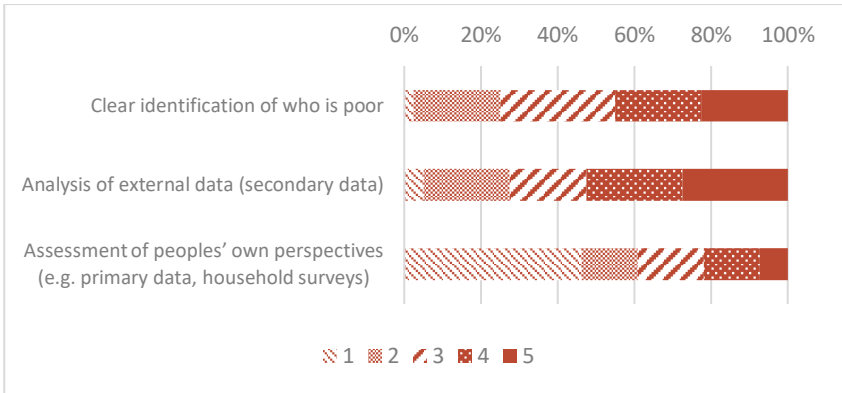


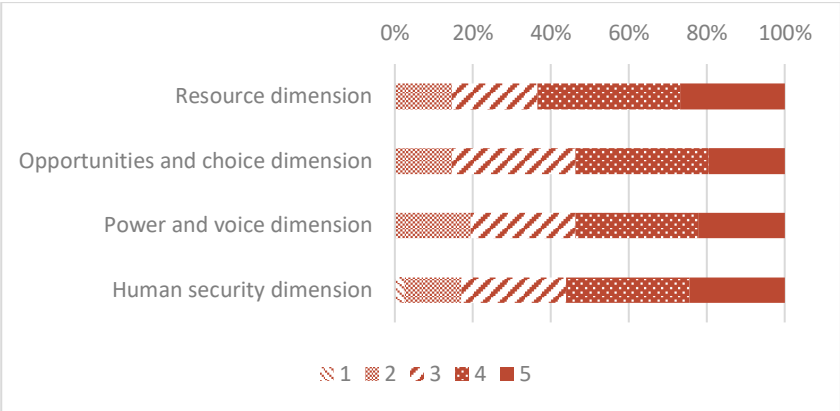
Figure 5 shows the number of reports for each quality score, on criteria related to the analysis of who is poor. There is a broad variation in the quality of the identification of who is poor, with nearly half of the reports getting scores 4 or 5 on this variable.

The identification of who is poor was mainly done using secondary sources (as opposed to first-hand sources) and often amounted to presenting descriptive statistics at a national level. Few MDPAs made attempts at narrowing down the group by combining different perspectives or criteria (such as gender, region, age and ethnicity) to identify specific groups of people. This was confirmed by several interviewees, some noting that the usefulness of the MDPA for identifying target groups is limited.

Together with the large number of reports that receive low scores on including people’s own perspectives on poverty into the analysis, this indicates that this perspective was mainly lost in the MDPAs. The description of the situation for people living in poverty is often weak, and in an attempt at putting more focus on this perspective, some MDPAs employ fictional examples of made-up persons as illustrations.

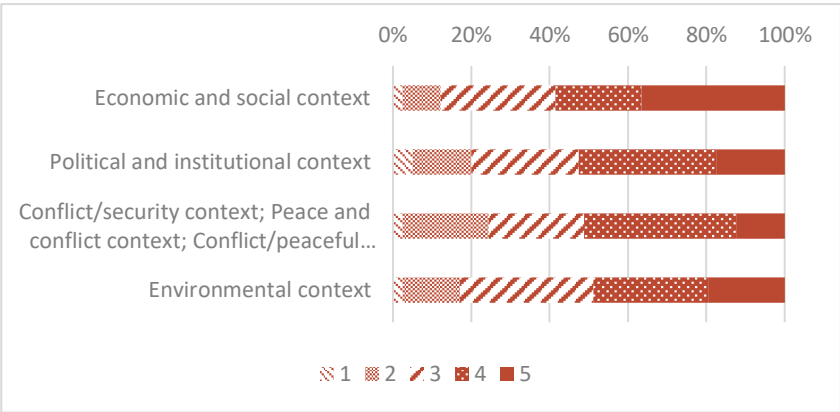
The quality of the analysis of how people are poor (the dimensions of poverty, illustrated in Figure 6) was fairly even, although the resource dimension received slightly higher scores than the other dimensions.

Figure 6: Quality of the analysis of dimensions of poverty



There is more variation in the quality of analysing why people are poor, i.e. the different aspects of the context, as illustrated in Figure 7, with higher scores for the economic and social context.

Figure 7: Quality of the analysis of the context



In sum, the review of MDPA reports indicate that the quality of the analysis is highest for the more ‘traditional’ aspects of poverty that focus on resources (the resource dimension of how people are poor, and the economic and social context of why people are poor). This is in line with the team’s observation that there is more data available on such aspects of poverty in the centrally provided resources and support. As noted, the quality is particularly low on two crucial

variables: incorporating the perspectives of the poor - which until recently has been a pillar of Swedish development cooperation - and presenting binding constraints and identifying aspects of these that Sida may affect - which is the main way for MDPAs to influence strategy formation. In some of the recent MDPAs, imaginary poor people are used to illustrate the perspectives of the poor. This contributes to the impression that the model lacks tools for representing poor people's perspective on poverty.

4.2 The MDPA process

The making of an MDPA is a major undertaking which in most cases requires considerable investment of staff time and, in some cases, financial resources. As noted in Chapter 3, while the contents of an MDPA are clear, there are few firm guidelines as to how the process should be structured. In this chapter, we present data on the process – who do the MDPAs, how are conclusions and binding constraints identified and what role do guidance, support from Sida HQ and field visits play.

4.2.1 Data collection, analysis and write-up

The vast majority of the MDPA reports reviewed by the team were prepared by the Sida unit at the embassy, often with support from Sida HQ (the Chief Economist Team or Analysts). Six of the MDPAs were carried out in cooperation with country-level partners (civil society organisations (CSO) or government). In one of the case countries, a local CSO supported the process in an expert/validating role. Most MDPAs seem to have been written by Sida staff, but several of the reports lacked a clear statement on authorship. Five of the MDPAs were fully authored by consultants, with no clear difference in quality compared to the other reports.

The survey responses also indicate that MDPAs are mainly done by Sida staff (sent out staff and national staff) at the embassies.⁹ When asked about the extent to which Sida staff at embassies were involved in making the latest MDPA, the average response was 4.5 on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very large extent). Sida analysts and the Chief Economist Team are also involved but to a lesser extent (average 3.3 and 3.4, respectively). Sida geographic departments and MFA staff at embassies are involved to a larger extent than Sida thematic departments, but all at a rather low level (averages between 2.2 to 2.8). Finally, partners are also involved to a rather small extent (average 2.5). (Annex 4.6, Survey q. 9.)

The case studies indicate that most of the writing and analysis takes place in smaller groups. These were organised in different ways - in one case study country, by gathering thematic experts, and in another, by putting officers in thematic groups they did not normally work on. The processes typically also include joint discussions of the entire team at two points in time: at the launch of the process and to decide on conclusions and binding constraints. There may also be workshops in between to advance the process and enable comments and suggestions.

The task of editing and bringing the contributions of different groups of authors together was perceived as time consuming and complicated. "It took a lot of time", one coordinator of an MDPA process noted. Similarly, providing references for the analysis was by some mentioned as a very cumbersome task – one interviewee describing it as "a nightmare".

When asked about the main challenges during the process, Sida staff interviewed almost uniformly stress time constraints, and the fact that the development of the MDPA is an added task that needs to be undertaken in parallel to their other responsibilities. At one embassy, the time pressure resulted in staff reluctance to allocate

⁹ See Annex 4.6. The survey response options range from 'not at all' to 'to a very large extent' and are weighted from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) to calculate the average.

more time to the process, created irritation and problems in the working environment.

“We had the knowledge in the team, but you need both knowledge and time to dedicate to this, and that you don’t have, as you have contribution management and the normal work as well.” (Head of Cooperation in one of the case study countries)

Among survey respondents, however, 42 percent agreed to a large or very large extent that they did have sufficient time for the MDPA. The comments provided by some survey respondents explain the difference: One noted that “The time available depends on how much time you allocate”, linking it to prioritisation. Another noted that ‘the content of the MDPA to a large extent depends on what I have had time to read’, indicating that the quality of the MDPA is affected by the amount of time devoted to it. This is expressed by one interviewee stating: “You gather a lot of information, but then you do not always have the time to fully analyse it.”

4.2.2 Field visits and consultations

The instructions on how to perform a MDPA encourage field visits. In the case country MDPAs studied, the field visits occur at different points in the process, and with different levels of ambition. Views on the field visits also differ. Some of the interviewed programme officers were happy with both the inputs to the MDPA and the joint experiences and possibility to discuss the themes together that the field visits provided. In three cases, National Programme Officers had the role as ‘knowledgeable guides’ during the field visits, which was particularly highlighted.

However, an interviewee in another case country referred to the field visits as “somewhat invasive” and of questionable value: If the purpose is as illustration of how different aspects of poverty intersect or to validate findings in this regard, then even the more ambitious

and structured process of field visits and discussions can only hope to cover a very small part of the realities present in the country.

Whereas field visits to intended beneficiaries were held mostly for the purpose of illustration or understanding, it has been more common to use consultations with experts and peers for direct input to the process.

In the survey responses cited above, the extent of involvement of experts and partners, although low on average, does vary. According to interviewees, in some countries consultations are limited to individual presentations during the process, typically by UN or World Bank representatives, while in others a more ambitious programme is designed: In DRC, four field visits were conducted and over 100 persons were consulted, “covering actors from national and international civil society, government, multilateral partners, and other bilateral donors” (Sida, 2024c:4)

4.2.3 Decision-making

The process is described by interview respondents as collective, participative and transparent. Similarly, a majority (60 percent) of the survey respondents agree to a large or very large extent that the MDPA process was open-minded and unbiased (Survey q.10). Also, a majority of the interviewees tell of an open atmosphere of the discussions where everybody was listened to, but some also noted that it became difficult to keep up active participation of all officers during the entire process.

However, several interviewees indicate that arguments during the workshops were sometimes influenced by factors such as concern for one’s own contributions and areas of work. As notes one Head of Cooperation, “everybody emphasised their parts [during the general discussion] and I had to work very actively to break that up.”

Decisions during the MDPA process were described by interviewees in some case countries as collective and consensus-based, with key

decisions made by allowing discussions to go on until a consensus acceptable to all could be found. In other case countries the final part of the work was done mainly by the officer in charge of the process. In the survey, 25 percent of the respondents expressed that they thought the identification of conclusions or binding constraints was to a large or very large extent a compromise between different interests. (Survey q.8)

Interestingly, the survey data shows that Heads of Cooperation had a more positive view on the reliability of the process than other staff groups: Of the Heads of Cooperation, only 12 percent agreed to a large or very large extent that the process was impacted by other motives or expectations, and 15 percent that the identification of conclusions or binding constraints was a compromise between different interests. These percentages were higher among other groups (50-65 percent and 50-55 percent, respectively, Survey q.10).

Heads of Cooperation could potentially have a major influence in the process by virtue of their position and having a greater strategic overview. However, examples from interviewees indicate that efforts were taken to avoid it and no interviewee indicated that such persons had tried to exert direct influence over the process or its findings.

4.2.4 Identifying binding constraints

A significant recent addition to the MDPA model is the identification of “binding constraints” as a key final step in the analysis. According to an interviewee at Sida HQ, this followed from a recognition that many of the earlier MDPAs stopped short of drawing the operational conclusions of the analysis, which limited the practical use of MDPA reports.

Recalling from Chapter 3 above, the binding constraints are “the key development challenges that severely restrict the potential for sustained poverty reduction and if they were to be addressed successfully, would produce the largest gains in terms of poverty reduction

for the identified target groups” (Sida, 2024b:13). As it now seems the binding constraints will be playing a central role in the identification of Sweden’s comprehensive development offers (Sida, 2024e:4f), the quality of the process of identifying and formulating these is crucial.

Several of the staff members who have taken part in recent MDPA analyses express appreciation of this step of the analysis, noting that the binding constraints are practically useful to an extent that other components of the MDPA are not. Furthermore, several indicate that this is the most important part of the process, building a holistic, integrated perspective for the team and for its continued work. One interviewee noted that: “It brings together the different pieces of the process. What does this mean for the poorest and what shall we as Sida focus on?”

At the same time, though, interviews reveal that identification of binding constraints is often done in a somewhat arbitrary manner, typically during brief (one-day) workshops at the end of the MDPA process. Several interviewees note the relative absence of instructions for this step in the process and some express surprise at how months of analysis are quickly resumed into formulations more aimed at being broad enough to satisfy all members of the team rather than at expressing succinct and strategic focus.

“It is such an important step, and it is done in an afternoon ... without much instruction.” (Case country interviewee)

The MDPA instructions note that, “[t]he identification of binding constraints is often a matter of judgement and not precise science” (Sida, 2023e:7). That same formulation is echoed by some case country interviewees noting the “quasi-scientific” character of the analysis or that it vainly tries to identify the original causes of poverty.

As a simple test, the team compared binding constraints from some of the most recent MDPA processes with ChatGPT answers to the query: “What are the main binding constraints to reduce multi-

dimensional poverty in [country x]?” The lists are quite similar, although ChatGPT suggestions often appear somewhat more extensive. This suggests that unless there is a value in the process of identifying binding constraints, there may be simpler ways of identifying these.

Notably, while most MDPA teams seem to have made an effort to limit the number of binding constraints they present in order to focus on the most important ones, one case country opted instead to include all binding constraints they believed were important. There were also some indications that staff keep an eye on the (current or expected) strategy goals and signals from the reform agenda, and what can be expected to be funded.

Table 2 compares (ongoing) strategy goals in the 2021-2026 Strategy for Mozambique (largely reflecting the 2019 MDPA), the binding constraints identified in Mozambique’s (draft) 2024 MDPA, and the priorities in the reform agenda. In this case, the 2024 MDPA binding constraints reflect current strategic priorities, and it remains to be seen how the in-depth strategy report for the upcoming strategy period will take note of reform agenda priorities. Green indicates total overlap, yellow some overlap and orange little or no overlap.

Table 1: Overlap of MDPA Binding Constraints, Strategy Goals and Reform Agenda for Mozambique

Strategy Goals 2021–2026	MDPA 2024 Binding Constraints	Reform Agenda Priorities
Human rights, democracy, rule of law and gender equality.	Unequal distribution of resources and power (6). Endemic corruption (8). Weak governance and deteriorating human rights (8).	Strengthen the freedom and empowerment of women and girls. Promote freedom and combat oppression.
Peaceful and inclusive societies.	Conflict and security (4).	
Inclusive economic development.	Lack of economic transformation (8).	Poverty reduction through job creation, trade, and education.
Environment, climate and sustainable use of natural resources.	Climate change and extreme weather effects (6).	Expanded and more efficient climate aid.
	Lack of investment in basic services (education) (3).	
		Strengthened synergies between aid and migration policies.
		Improved health for the most vulnerable.
		Strengthened humanitarian aid to save lives and alleviate suffering.

4.2.5 Instructions, guidance and support from HQ

Survey respondents and interviewees unanimously express appreciation for the support provided by the Chief Economist Team and Sida HQ, although some interviewees said that at times the Chief Economist Team was more concerned with formalities (have you ticked all the boxes?) than content and analysis. The support comes in the form of guides, centrally provided data and hands-on assistance to the process (e.g. visits and workshops). The support has increased over time and now includes centrally provided access to data, charts, tables, and templates for MDPA presentations. Interviewees who have experienced several MDPA processes noted that the increased support lessens the workload on the local team.

However, while the share of survey respondents who found the instructions easy to find and access was relatively high (average score 4.3), the share that found them easy to understand and apply was somewhat smaller (average 4.0). Some survey respondents commented that the analysis was challenging, that the instructions were not understandable, and that support from Chief Economist Team members was more useful than the instructions (Survey q.8). Some interviewees also expressed that there are too many tools: In the words of one exasperated programme officer, “it is not humanly possible for us to take in all these kinds of tools”.

Three areas of the support are criticised however: thematic briefs, the centrally provided data, and guidance on the MDPA process. The thematic briefs are seen by some respondents to be too generic, impractical to apply in a given context and to bring in too many aspects consider.

The centrally provided data, although highly appreciated, is criticised by both interview and survey respondents for being outdated and for differing from locally available data. In at least one country, this created confusion about which data the MDPA could and should actually use. 45 percent of survey respondents agreed to a large or very large extent that they did have access to the data they needed,

but several of them commented on the lack or low quality of data for their countries. (Survey q.8.)

Another area of critique is instructions on the process, i.e. how to perform the MDPA (as opposed to what to include in it):

“The process created a lot of frustration and tension in the team. The only good thing was 1-2 workshop where we as a team discussed openly what are the root causes of poverty (although also that confusing because [there is] no clarity on what is a binding constraint).” (Survey respondent)

A review of the instructions on how MDPAs should be performed reveals that they are not very specific. The original decision establishing the process limited itself to stating that, “We recommend doing a comprehensive multidimensional poverty analysis at one point in the strategy process and then regularly revisiting this analysis.” (Sida, 2017:15)

Subsequent instructions provided more guidance on the process. A 2023 (Sida, 2023e: 3) paper noted that, “[t]he process to conduct an MDPA is equally important as the end product.” The same document provided suggestions as to how the work could be structured, expressed in the form of somewhat vague advice (e.g. that MDPAs are typically led by a smaller core team; that many find field visits useful; that partners are often involved to some extent). Then follows a rather concrete outline of what to include in the analysis. Hence, while there is a firm definition of what should be studied (the dimensions of poverty and the contextual factors), how to organise the process and how to do the analysis is to a larger extent left to the discretion of the individual units.

The Chief Economist Team noted in interviews that the vagueness of instructions on the process is intentional, as the idea is to give the units discretion and to set few rules for how to structure the process. Although this may explain the wide variation of process and results found among the MDPAs, interview and survey data clearly indicate

that it also has implications for the quality of the conclusions of the analyses.

In sum, there are considerable differences between MDPA processes in terms of structure, the use of data and consultations, and distribution of responsibilities. To some extent, these differences may reflect different contextual factors and resources, but also different levels of ambition, interest, and understanding of the process among the participating staff members.

Despite these differences, a number of common themes stand out from the analysis. First, MDPAs are undertaken in a collective, collaborative and open fashion within the relevant development cooperation sections. Secondly, the high demands that such participation place on programme officers' time and commitment, has at times led to resistance and criticism of the model. And thirdly, the somewhat arbitrary way of identifying and prioritising binding constraints raises concerns for some Sida staff about their utility for operational work.

5 Use and effects of the MDPA

The MDPA process has resulted in both tangible and intangible outputs – the tangible being the MDPA reports and presentations, and the intangible the effects of the process, as we will learn below, on increased understanding of Sida’s multidimensional view on poverty and how this manifest itself in the local context. In this chapter, we assess how the MDPA process and reports are used and influence Sida’s bilateral development cooperation.

The first part of the chapter presents evidence and findings about how the MDPA contributes to professional cohesion and a common understanding of the concept of multidimensional poverty. The second part explores the role of the MDPA in the strategy formulation and follow-up processes. The third part explores how the MDPA contributes to the contribution management, and the fourth part looks at partner communication.

5.1 MDPA and professional cohesion

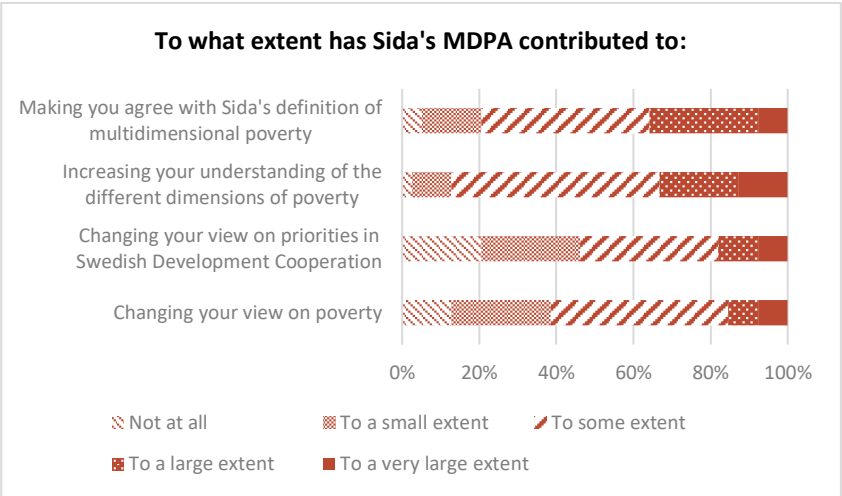
An important outcome of the MDPA process is the role it has for professional and social cohesion and joint learning at unit or embassy level. Despite the difficulties and challenges described above, a majority of the interviewees expressed that the MDPA process contributed to increasing their understanding of multidimensional poverty and of poverty in the local context. Several interviewees also commented that the MDPA process gives the team an opportunity for joint reflection and the development of a more integrated view of their work. This was seen as a main output from the exercise.

This finding is echoed in the survey data. Nearly all survey respondents (90 percent) agreed that the MDPA process resulted in new insights (Survey q.10). It helped them understand local contexts (70 percent agreeing to a large or very large extent) and was useful

for providing an objective assessment of poverty (95 percent agreeing to a large or very large extent). (Survey q.11.)

The responses to survey question 13 (see Figure 8) show that the MDPA process has indeed increased the understanding of the different dimensions of poverty and increased the acceptance of Sida’s view on multidimensional poverty (80 and 87 percent respectively, stating it did so to at least some extent). The MDPA has not to the same extent changed the respondents’ view on poverty per se and priorities in Swedish Development aid – which several respondents commented was because they already largely agree with the overarching goals of poverty reduction in Swedish development aid.

Figure 8: Immediate benefits from the MDPA



Both interviewees and survey respondents praised team building as one of the most prominent effects of the MDPA process. Interestingly, there was a variation in how respondents in different roles perceived the team-building effect, with analysts and heads of cooperation having a more positive view of the team building effect than programme officers.

The MDPA process also gave the national staff an opportunity to share their knowledge and views. Several of the interviews with

National Programme Officers indicated that the MDPA process is an important occasion for them to contribute with their local knowledge and make a mark in the embassies. They usually have a longer history at the embassy than their Swedish counterparts, they are knowledgeable with a different perspective than sent-out staff, and interviews confirm that they have important contributions to the process.

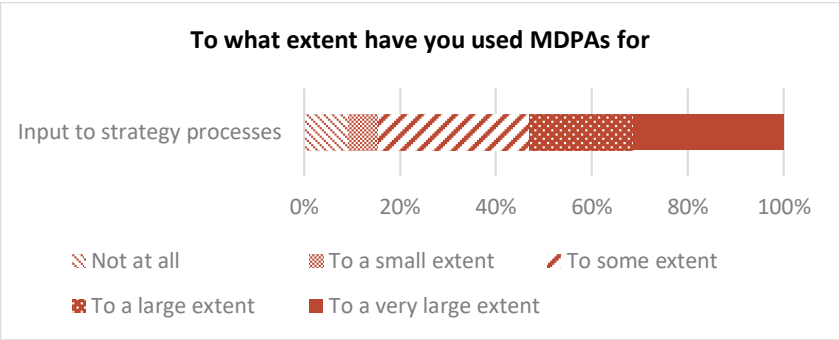
Similarly, several interviewees mentioned the usefulness of the MDPA report as a reference in their work, containing information that is checked and readily available. Some noted that the MDPA is an important way for Swedish Sida staff to integrate into new posting-locations.

5.2 MDPA and the strategy process

5.2.1 Contribution of MDPAs to strategy formation

As noted in Chapter 3.2, the MDPA shall be used as input to the in-depth strategy report, which in turn provides input to the government's strategy formulation. This is reflected in embassy interviews, which generally refer to the required in-depth strategy report as the most important trigger for an MDPA-process, and the most directly relevant use of the resulting report. A majority of survey respondents said they had used the MDPA as input for the strategy process, over half of them to a large or very large extent (Survey q.12).

Figure 9: Use of MDPAs in the strategy process



However, the MDPA report is only one of several sources of information for the in-depth strategy reports and not all findings from the MDPA make their way into the strategy report. The actual MDPA reports seldom reach the ministry, as noted by one interviewee, who expressed a wish to see the original MDPAs in order to assess whether in-depth strategy reports actually represent their contents.

Hence, there are two layers of filtering: one in the selection of which conclusions or binding constraints to include in the MDPA report (see Chapter 4.2.4), and the other in the selection of which of these that are considered in the in-depth strategy reports.

In Table 1 in Chapter 4.2.4 above, the 2024 MDPA for Mozambique was compared to the strategy objectives of the strategy period coming to an end, to see if the strategy objectives were reflected in the MDPA. Here, we do the opposite to see if MDPA binding constraints are reflected in in-depth strategy reports. The team identified seven in-depth strategy reports submitted during 2023 and 2024. Four of these can be matched to previously performed MDPAs.¹⁰ While all of these four in-depth strategy reports make references to their respective MDPAs, the extent and functions of such references

¹⁰ Of the remaining three, one corresponds to Russia, for which there seems to be no MDPA. In two other cases the MDPAs were concluded after the in-depth strategy reports were made.

differ: In one in-depth strategy report, the MDPA is employed in relatively detailed discussions on the poverty situation for specific groups, the structure of poverty and the thematic focus (Sida, 2024d); in another, references to the MDPA are much fewer and mostly deal with possible future uses of MDPA for internal learning, follow-up, and dialogue (Sida, 2023f).

The review also shows that the correspondence between the binding constraints identified in the MDPA and the strategy objectives proposed in the in-depth strategy report is by no means absolute. As illustrated in Table 2 below, both formulations and thematic priorities identified by the MDPAs are often presented in an altered form in the in-depth strategy reports. The colours green, yellow and orange are used to indicate strong, some and none or minimal overlap.

Table 2: Comparison of binding constraints and strategy objectives for Tanzania

MDPA Tanzania 2023: binding constraints	In-depth strategy report: suggested strategy objectives (Sida, 2023f)
Inadequate human capital. Unsustainable financing and investment. Growth is not inclusive, nor job creating.	Inclusive and sustainable economic growth through job creation, trade and education.
Weak sexual and reproductive health rights.	Increased possibilities for enjoying equal human rights, particularly for girls and women.
Weak governance and the rule of law.	
	Sustainable use and protection of natural resources and strengthened conditions for a fair green transformation.

Although four of the binding constraints are covered to some extent by the suggested strategy objectives, one is not, and other objectives have been added.

Such differences were also seen in other cases. For instance, education and human capital, although featuring as binding constraints, were found to be downplayed or even disregarded in the subsequent in-depth strategy reports. Conversely, issues such as health or environment and climate were sometimes added to the proposed strategy objectives without being identified as binding constraints.

The link between the MDPA and the choices made in the eventual strategy becomes even more tenuous during the subsequent MFA part of the process, when Sida's input is combined with overall government priorities, other Swedish interests, and other external considerations in the process of elaborating the development strategy. This is illustrated in Table 4 below, which compares the binding constraints presented in the MDPA, the new goals presented in the (draft) in-depth strategy report and the reform agenda priorities, for Kenya.

The comparison shows little representation of the binding constraints in the proposed strategy goals, but a high degree of coherence between the proposed strategy goals and the reform agenda. While the in-depth strategy report refers to poverty and poverty reduction 48 times and to the Reform Agenda 13 times, the MDPA is only explicitly referred to once and binding constraints not at all. Still, current staff state that there are overlaps between the MDPA and the (proposed) strategy goals at contribution level.

Table 3: Comparison of MDPA/Binding Constraints, Proposed Strategy Goals and Reform Agenda, in Kenya

MDPA 2024 Binding Constraints	Proposed Strategy Goals 2026-2031	Reform Agenda Priorities
Non-inclusive, non-poor labour market.	Combated poverty through job creation, trade, and education.	Poverty reduction through job creation, trade, and education.
Degradation of ecosystems/Natural Resources.	Expanded and more efficient climate aid.	Expanded and more efficient climate aid.
	Strengthened synergies between aid and migration policies.	Strengthened synergies between aid and migration policies.
	Promote freedom and combat oppression.	Promote freedom and combat oppression.
Unequal opportunities/ access to quality basic services.		Improved health for the most vulnerable.
Harmful social norms/cultural practises.		Strengthen the freedom and empowerment of women and girls.
Weak governance and rule of law.		
Systemic Corruption.		
		Strengthened humanitarian aid to save lives and alleviate suffering.

Comparison of MDPAs and strategies for other countries also indicate the unclear role of MDPAs in the strategies, with examples of both more narrow and broader focus in the strategy than in the MDPA. In Uganda, for example, rather specific binding constraints in the MDPA are matched by considerably broader objectives in the strategy for 2025-2029.

Thus, the general nature of the government strategies and of the objectives formulated reveals little of the detailed analysis performed in the MDPA. As one interviewee with good insight into the process concludes, “I am basically very positively inclined to the MDPA, but one should not exaggerate its effect on the [development] strategies.”

As noted in Chapter 3, the formal link between the MDPA and the formulation of development strategies has been removed by the present government (Government of Sweden 2024b). Accordingly, there is currently no remaining formal requirement for Sida to base its input to the strategy process on the MDPA. However, as the goal of Swedish development cooperation is still the same, a multi-dimensional perspective on poverty and poverty reduction – and hence the MDPA – is still relevant.

5.2.2 MDPA in strategy follow-up

Sida delivers updates on the results of Sida’s implementation of the development strategies in annual strategy reports. These reports necessarily focus on the strategy objectives and not on a follow-up of the MDPAs made. At the same time, given the centrality of the multidimensional poverty perspective for Sida’s work, the MDPA perspective may be expected to be reflected in these documents to some extent.

A review of strategy reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023 for the six case study countries reveals that 11 of the 18 strategy reports make at least some kind of reference to MDPAs. However, no report explicitly refers to MDPA conclusions, and an implicit correspondence between the reports’ content and the MDPA’s priorities can only be detected in four of them.

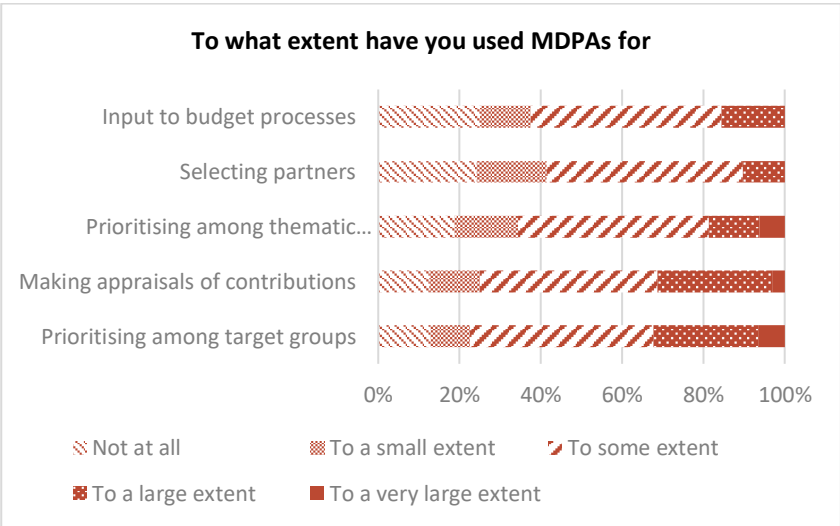
What is more striking is that the absolute majority of the annual strategy reports do not visibly employ a multi-dimensional poverty perspective. Only four of the annual strategy reports reviewed contain (generally brief) discussions of poverty employing a multi-

dimensional view, which is just as many as address poverty in purely economic/income terms. None of the reports makes an attempt to measure multidimensional poverty or its possible reduction. However, as noted above, this should be seen in the light of the rather low level of correspondence between MDPAs and strategy goals.

5.3 MDPA and programme management

Two thirds of the survey respondents agreed to at least some extent that the MDPA had resulted in changes in the country programmes. They also reported that they had used MDPA reports in their daily work, but to a varying extent, indicating that national programme officers and analysts had used it to a larger extent than Heads of Cooperation and sent-out programme officers (Survey q 10). The survey responses indicate that MDPAs are used in portfolio management and for making prioritisations – 60 to 80 percent of respondents to this question say they have used them to at least some extent and 10 to 30 percent to a large or very large extent.

Figure 10: How is the MDPA used?



The interviews provide some concrete examples of how MDPA findings or perspectives have been used: In one case study country, suggestions for reductions in one part of the portfolio were assessed according to an MDPA lens; in another, the MDPA was used to identify the most relevant partners to work with in order to improve conditions for a target group that was identified in the MDPA.

Sida's decision to enter into a financial contribution to a project or programme rests on a formal process of appraisal. During such processes, programme officers assess the relevance, risks and potential of the proposed intervention. The results are documented in an "appraisal memo" attached to the eventual decision on contribution.

The appraisal memos follow a set format. One section requires an analysis of "Poor People's Perspective", and the manual for Sida's contribution management system (Trac) specifically instructs programme officers to consider: "the link between the MDPA and the specific contribution and refer to it in the assessment" (Sida, 2024f:32). Furthermore, programme officers are recommended to address whether the contribution will have an effect on the different dimensions of multidimensional poverty and whether this is in line with the conclusions of the MDPA (Sida, 2024f:33).

However, there are no such references in the interface where information is recorded (Trac), nor are there any specific questions related to the MDPA model. As the manual is a 300-page document, and help functions are not obligatory to access, instructions regarding the MDPA may be easy to miss (Sida, 2024f).

According to survey responses, about 75 percent of the respondents had used MDPAs to at least some extent in contribution appraisals. A review of actual appraisal memo documents for a random sample of contributions¹¹ in the case countries gives a somewhat different picture, however: Of the 32 appraisal memos that were reviewed, 10 make explicit reference to an MDPA. Five of these mention the MDPA once, the others mention it at most five times. Beyond this,

¹¹ See Annex 4.5 for a list of the contributions.

only 40 percent make any kind of reference to the analysis of multi-dimensional poverty, and of those only seven do so in a more sustained manner. The word 'poverty' is used in 30 of the 32 appraisal memos, and eight of the documents mention poverty alleviation, although none more than a few times.

Even if direct references are scant, there are other indications that the MDPAs influence the analysis in the appraisal memos. Comparing key elements of the MDPA with the appraisal memos, the team found some similarities: For a majority of the documents, the MDPA and appraisal memos identify the same groups as being poor, how they are poor and why.

Table 4: Correspondence between appraisal memos and MDPAs on who is poor, how and why

Extent of correspondence	Correspondence regarding		
	Who is poor	Dimensions of poverty (How)	Contexts (Why)
Unclear	4	1	
None	2	7	8
Some	14	14	15
Much	12	10	9
Total	32	32	32

Source: Review of appraisal memos and MDPAs for contributions listed in Annex 4.5.

However, the discussions are often rather brief and, in about a fifth of the cases, the correspondence is unclear or non-existent. The poverty dimensions applied in the MDPA are explicitly mentioned in 37 percent of the appraisal memos assessed, and only one of these can be said to perform an analysis that corresponds to a multi-dimensional perspective. Furthermore, in no case is the selection of beneficiaries of the proposed intervention based on a reference to such an analysis.

There are even less traces of the MDPAs in Sida's documents from contribution follow-up, as indicated by the team's review of "Conclusions on Performance" documents. The instructions indicate that these should "ensure that Sida, once a year, makes a broader analysis of how the contribution is progressing", and ask what changes it has led to (Sida, 2024f:188). The review of conclusions on performance documents, for the same sample of contributions as above, shows that reported results that are explicitly related to poverty or poverty reduction are scarce. Out of 28 conclusions on performance documents reviewed, only ten make even a passing reference to poverty, and none do so in a way that indicates a multidimensional perspective on poverty. Clear references to multidimensional poverty perspectives are entirely absent. It should be noted, though, that not all contributions are implemented under a strategy with poverty reduction as an explicit goal and the Conclusions on Performance are generally very brief.

In sum, the MDPAs feature intermittently in Sida's management of its contributions. Whereas references (explicit or implicit) to the instrument appear relatively frequently in appraisal memos, evidence of a more thorough analysis along multidimensional lines is uncommon, as are references to previously performed MDPAs in the annual conclusions on performance.

5.4 MDPA in partner communication

As noted above (Chapter 4.1), few MDPA processes involve partners directly, and if so, as resource-persons and discussants. In addition, partner interviews suggest that the MDPA findings are not systematically used in dialogue between Sida and its partners (governments, NGOs, academia, other donors), and survey responses indicate that the MDPAs are not perceived to be useful for dialogue with local partners, government counterparts and other donors (Survey q. 11).

In several of the case study countries, Sida has organised presentation sessions to its partners, highlighting key points and observations from the analysis and binding constraints. Even so, many partners interviewed claim not to know the approach in detail, few have read the MDPA report and some have not heard about the MDPA at all. The partners that had heard about the MDPA had done so by way of participation in seminars or workshops at the embassy or in meetings related to applications or follow up of contributions. Notably, in at least one case, the MDPA report has not been translated into the commonly spoken language.

There are examples where MDPAs have been used in partner dialogue, however. One early case, shared by a Sida HQ interviewee, is an MDPA which was communicated to partners in government, civil society, academia as well as other donors. This instigated a number of responses and a series of joint meetings on alternative approaches to poverty, also at national level in the country. However, in another case publication of the MDPA results (produced by a local NGO) led to stinging public criticism from the highest government levels as it contradicted their own estimates of poverty reduction (La Prensa, 2019).

There are also examples where the MDPA approach has been followed meticulously by partners in the development of applications for project/programme funding – often by NGOs who are familiar with the thinking and terminology. This was evident in one of the contribution documents reviewed by the team, for instance.¹²

When the MDPA was explained to some of the partners interviewed by the team (with the use of Figure 1), the reactions were twofold: Some were very enthusiastic about the MDPA approach and argued that it adequately reflects what it means to be poor. They recognise that poverty is about more than income and refer to recent events in their country that demonstrate this, such as corruption, violent conflicts and drought. As one put it:

12 Contribution 16756.

“This is so good that it should take the place of the Swedish national anthem!” (Partner interviewee)

Others responded that the MDPA approach is a good idea, but difficult to use in practice as it does not communicate well with alternative datasets they use, such as classical income and consumption-based indexes or more limited multidimensional poverty indices. Likewise, some interviewees from UN agencies and government agencies focussing on social development or social protection interventions argued that they have better tools for their needs to reach their target group among people living in poverty. Some of the embassy interviewees expressed the same opinion.

None of the partners interviewed have adopted the MDPA approach outright, beyond individual applications. A multidimensional view on poverty is however broadly accepted as a ‘good way to think’ and is frequently employed by partners irrespective of Sida’s embrace of the concept and method. This is not only attributed to the MDPA, but also to more accessible data sets such as the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (OPHI/UNDP, 2023). Furthermore, universities in most case-study countries produce poverty studies in the qual-quant tradition of high quality and relevance that are used by local actors. Multidimensional approaches are used, but still often in combination with income and consumption-based indexes.

At an overall level, the presence of an explicit poverty reduction policy and approach in the form of MDPAs has contributed to maintaining the perception among partners of Sida as a donor that takes poverty reduction seriously. This was noted by interviewed partners and by several of the Sida HQ staff interviewed, who stated that the MDPA has a value as signalling Sida’s understanding of, and strong focus on, poverty and poverty reduction, and that this contributed to strengthening Sida’s regard with other development actors.

“We know that Sweden is a reliable partner and will contribute to help poor people in this country”. (Partner interviewee)

This, together with the evident effort put into the MDPA undertaking, provide a clear indication of the importance that Sida attaches to the concept of multidimensional poverty. This is at a time when Sweden, just as many other donors, reduces its presence in low-income-countries, decreases its aid funding and pursue other priorities with less obvious implications for poverty reduction. This is also the case with 'like-minded' Nordic countries. Neither Norway nor Denmark has explicit poverty reduction strategies beyond the overall goal of contributing to reducing poverty, and the focus has become increasingly difficult to identify (Kjær et al. 2022).

In sum, while there is a link between the MDPAs and the elaboration of Swedish development strategies, the translation of MDPA findings into strategy objectives is indirect, and relatively little of the MDPA analysis finds its way into the eventual strategies. Moreover, explicit links to MDPAs in Sida's contribution management system are few and irregular in appraisal memos, and near absent in conclusions on performance.

As noted in Chapter 5.1, a large number of interviewees and survey respondents highlighted that the process of doing an MDPA has increased their understanding of multidimensional poverty and its determinants in the local context. Similarly, the survey respondents stated that they do use the MDPAs in their daily work and for prioritisation. We also noted that although partners were rarely involved in MDPA processes, or had access to the MDPA reports, they do understand Sida as promoting a multidimensional perspective on poverty.

Interviews with Sida staff in different case study countries and at Sida HQ indicated that a 'MDPA way of thinking about poverty' is implicitly present in its work, and some programme officers referred to the MDPA as a sort of internal reference for their subsequent contribution management.

“A reason for limited direct referencing to the MDPA may be that we take it for granted: We know it is there and use it – but perhaps we should make more direct reference to it.” (Sida Embassy staff)

6 MDPA institutionalisation

Having related to the more practical and tangible aspects of the MDPA process and outcomes in MFA and Sida in the preceding chapters, we will here take a closer look at the extent to which a multidimensional view on poverty and the MDPA has been institutionalised (ref. Evaluation Question 1).

As noted earlier, 'institutionalisation' generally refers to the extent to which policies, structures, rules, norms and practices become established and widely accepted as legitimate and taken for granted within an organisation (Meyer and Rowan 1977 and Scott 2015). The process involves the formalisation of policies and procedures that guide the behaviour of groups and individuals and the extent to which this ensures stability, predictability, and continuity.

For the purpose of this evaluation – and returning to Bourdieu (see Chapter 2) – the issue of 'institutionalisation' of poverty reduction and the MDPA perspective as an integral part of Swedish development assistance can usefully be approached from three angles: the political level, the organisational level, and the level of Sida staff and human agency. Below, we analyse institutionalisation of the multidimensional poverty approach and poverty reduction from these three levels.

6.1 The political level

The political level is where decisions and priorities of the Swedish Parliament, the Government and the MFA on development cooperation priorities – including the role of poverty reduction and the relevance of the MDPAs – are made.

The overarching objective of Swedish development cooperation is defined – and annually confirmed – by the Swedish Parliament. The wording of that objective has, since 2013, been to contribute towards "...improved living conditions for people living in poverty and

under oppression”. At that level, and with large popular support (Sida 2024g), the goal has been institutionalised and consistent (Carlsson, 2019; OECD/DAC, 2024).

At the same time, shifting governments have interpreted the overarching goal in different ways, and poverty reduction policies have changed with changing global ODA and Swedish priorities. Interviews with Sida staff and survey responses confirm that this is seen as having a significant impact on Swedish development cooperation and the relevance of the MDPA - with other donors and partner governments having a more limited impact (Survey q. 16).

The most recent policy shift has been the introduction of the Reform Agenda (MFA Sweden, 2023). Interview responses vary in their views on the extent to which they think the new agenda is changing the institutional embeddedness of poverty reduction and the MDPA in Swedish aid. Some argue that what they see as an enhanced emphasis on Swedish interests, trade and private sector, synergies between aid and migration, and global challenges such as climate change in the Reform Agenda, will take the focus away from poverty reduction and the MDPA approach.

Others argue that these issues can be easily incorporated into the aid portfolio at their embassy, that they are important for poverty reduction and that the essence of Swedish development cooperation will continue to be the focus on people living in multidimensional poverty and under oppression.

Still, interviewees at the MFA claim that there is little debate as to the exact definition and conceptualisation of poverty there – including its possible multidimensionality. It is also notable that the current policy framework for Swedish development cooperation lacks references to multi-dimensional poverty, and that it has recently been decided (Government of Sweden 2024b) to not ask Sida to perform MDPAs as a basis for its inputs to the government.

In sum, poverty reduction has over the years been institutionalised as an integral part of Swedish development cooperation as an over-

arching objective. Shifting governments have interpreted this in different ways, with the current government apparently changing ODA priorities and not giving a multidimensional view and the MDPA approach explicit attention.

According to the OECD/DAC (2024:2), Sweden has placed poverty reduction at the centre of its development cooperation system: “This is hardwired into the system through its multidimensional poverty analysis tool” But the report also warns that “ [p]rotecting these resources and strengths whilst seeking efficiency gains will be a fine balancing act for the new government in its Reform Agenda”.

Many Sida interviewees refer to the overarching goal of poverty reduction in Swedish development aid and emphasise that poverty reduction for them is the essential part of working for Sida.

“It would be embarrassing to work for an aid organisation that does not have a poverty reduction strategy” (Interview with a Sida staff member)

6.2 The organisational level

The organisational level consists of procedures, rules and regulations that govern the operation of Sida, providing a framework for decision-making and accountability.

The organisational position of Sida as a (subordinate) agency to the MFA is obviously acknowledged and understood by Sida staff. This includes the link between the (MFA) country-level strategies – that are key for Sida’s operational work – and Sida’s MDPA process.

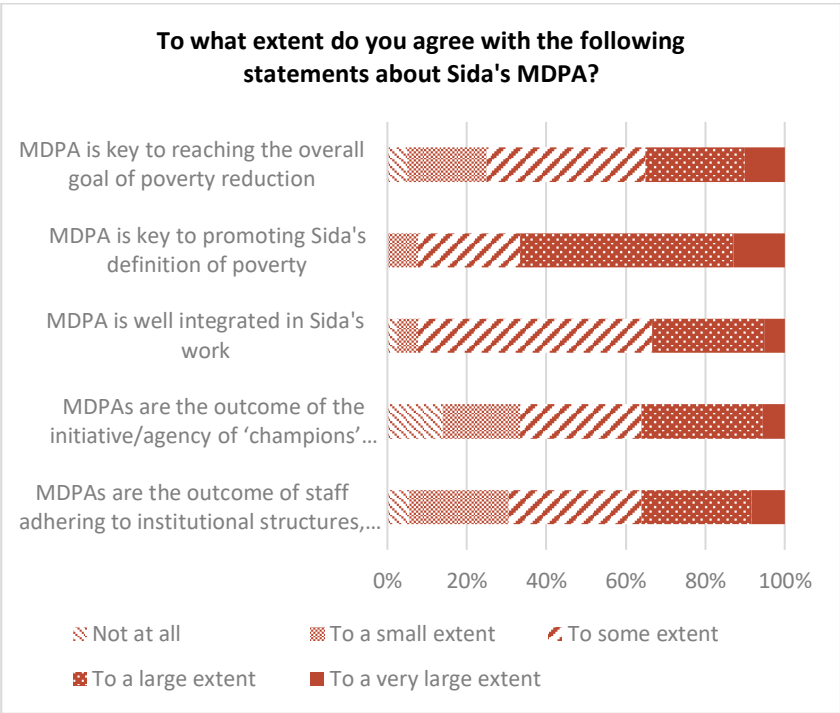
However, as we have seen, this has recently been confounded by a discontinuation of the formal recognition of the MDPA as part of the strategy process. Also, the more explicit relation between the MDPA conclusions on binding constraints and the eventual strategy objectives are unclear – leading to a degree of uncertainty as regards

Sida’s actual role in contributing with a multidimensional view on poverty at policy- and strategy level.

Looking at Sida in particular, some of the interviewees were asked what the response would be to a fictive survey in Sida’s canteen at a busy lunch, asking how many have heard about the MDPA - they all answered ‘everybody’ (with a couple adding ‘maybe not if you just started...’).

Survey and interview responses confirm that the procedures of doing an MDPA are well known and seen as integrated into most of Sida’s bilateral cooperation. This is illustrated by the responses to Survey q. 14. As seen, the emphasis given to importance of institutional structures and regulations, and the role of ‘champions’ in driving the process forward, is near equal.

Figure 11: Institutionalisation of MDPA



The organisational rules and regulations are institutionalised through multiple guidelines and perspectives but - as noted in Chapter 4 and 5 – they are not always followed. While generally considered accessible (ref. Survey q. 8), the MDPA guidelines are also considered ‘ambitious’ and ‘complex’ by most staff interviewed.

The initiative for developing the MDPA and pushing for its use and implementation at Sida is seen to come from Sida HQ with the Chief Economist Team as a central actor.

“Chief Economist Team is in the driving seat in the sense that they own the product and develop the product.”
(Survey respondent)

At the same time, the variations in MDPA processes and outcomes accounted for in Chapter 4 and 5 show that the position and role of the MDPA in Sida is not solely based on classical organisational approaches with structured hierarchies, rules and regulations as the basis for organisational behaviour. There is, as also shown above, a considerable degree of organisational freedom to the extent that embassies may choose to disregard the MDPA process and implementation altogether.

At the level of the embassies, procedures, rules and regulations also have an impact on the MDPA process and outcomes. The formal responsibilities are clear, with heads of cooperation being responsible, designated individuals (often analysts) being in charge of practical implementation and staff in the development sections expected to contribute to process and operational outcomes.

However, interviewed Sida staff highlight several organisational factors that affect the efficiency in doing the MDPAs. One is the increasing responsibilities of Sida staff, both in development work

and for new tasks such as coordinating with Team Sweden.¹³ A second is the relatively frequent change of personnel (even though some have experience from other embassies), which affects organisational learning. And a third is decreasing funding, making several interviewees state that, while they would have liked to work on projects for poverty reduction, they actually spend most of their time in ongoing commitments.

In sum, the procedures, rules and regulations of doing the MDPA and adhering to a multidimensional view on poverty are institutionalised in Sida as an organisation in the sense that they are streamlined and considered clear by Sida staff (ref. Survey q. 8) – even though there are questions about the ultimate utility of the MDPA process, and organisational challenges at embassy level have an impact on efficiency (ref. Survey q. 10). As our finding above indicate, institutionalisation in terms of guiding behaviour is not absolute.

6.3 The level of Sida staff and human agency

At the level of Sida staff and human agency, habits, skills, dispositions and ways of thinking (*habitus*), and different forms of *capital* (authority, knowledge, relations etc.) among and between groups and individuals help explain the extent to which the MDPA is accepted, internalised and reproduced.

Despite the formal institutionalisation of the MDPA's process, the data presented above have shown that the MDPA reports differ considerably in frequency, content (some being truly multidimensional and some focussing heavily on the resource dimension), style (from long reports to power point presentations), and the extent to which

13 Team Sweden is a collaborative initiative by the Swedish Government that brings together public agencies, organizations, and companies to promote Sweden's interests abroad.

they draw operational conclusions or develop binding constraints (see Chapter 4.2).

The majority of embassies do the MDPAs internally or in cooperation with Sida HQ/Chief Economist Team (Chapter 4.2). This involves data collection, work in thematic groups, field trips, contributions by partners, joint workshops and writing relevant reports or power-point presentations. Working together like this is seen by Sida staff at embassies as an important aspect of the internalisation of a multidimensional perspective on poverty, the MDPA model and its implementation. As repeatedly stated by the Chief Economist Team:

“The process is 50 percent [of the value of doing the MDPAs]”. (Sida staff member)

Participation and perceptions of the importance and relevance of the MDPA process vary with the interviewees’ position, knowledge and relations – influencing their attitude, engagement and ultimate application of the tool.

Embassy interviews show that there is a range of approaches to MDPAs, including cases of scepticism at management level by a leader who wanted to prioritise other tasks; staff who don’t see it as relevant for their specific responsibilities and put limited efforts into it; staff who are engaged through a combination of a sense of duty and interest; National Programme Officers who are engaged on the basis of their knowledge and keen sense of importance of the process – and ‘champions’ who are actively engaged through a combination of formal responsibility and keen interest in poverty and the MDPA approach. Staff most directly engaged in the MDPA process seem to be the most positive.

The survey shows that there is equal support for the statement that the MDPA is the outcome of ‘staff adhering to institutional structures, regulations and guidelines’ as to the statement that the MDPA is the outcome of ‘the initiative/agency of champions who

push the process forward', with approximately 50 percent agreeing to a large or very large extent to both statements (Survey q. 14).

Frequent references have been made by interview respondents to the 'champion' role of the Chief Economist Team for developing the concept and pushing for its application, and at the embassy level one or two staff members are often referred to as 'crucial' for the implementation of the process.

The degree to which the MDPAs are actively or consciously used – or 'internalised' – by Sida staff varies. The data referred to earlier suggest that this rests on a combination of alternative and competing strategies and directives, challenges applying the MDPAs in practical work and different perceptions of its relevance (Survey q. 12).

Survey responses referred to in earlier chapters also indicate that the MDPA has contributed to an increased understanding of the different dimensions of poverty, to making the staff agree with or internalise Sida's definition of multidimensional poverty.

However, the MDPA has not affected the respondents' overall view on poverty, or on priorities in Swedish development cooperation, to any large extent. This is expressed by several interviewees and survey respondents stating that the MDPA has helped operationalise an already existing view on poverty, or as expressed by one of the survey respondents:

"I think my knowledge, understanding and opinion of poverty were already in line with the MDPA concepts. Probably because I have worked at Sida for so long."
(Survey respondent)

At the same time, Sida staff continue to be exposed to other/alternative perceptions of poverty. Some state that the MDPA approach is not particularly novel, referring to similar methodologies and data particularly in UN agencies. Others acknowledge that they also use more traditional approaches – including quantitative income and consumption data from partner countries. And yet, others refer to

the wealth of other research and studies internationally and in partner countries for a broader view on poverty. This includes references to Human Rights Approaches, with the argument that this is more suitable for understanding the impact that crises have on countries and as drivers of poverty, and of the intersection between poverty and humanitarian needs.

In sum, the MDPAs and a multidimensional view on poverty is largely – but not universally – internalised, accepted and reproduced among Sida staff. While there is broad adherence to the importance of poverty reduction and a multidimensional view on poverty, there are variations in the extent to which the MDPA is institutionalised as an important aspect of operational work. ‘Champions’ in the system often play an important role in moving the MDPA process forward (ref. Survey q. 14).

Concluding with reference to Bourdieu’s analytical framework, we find that broader *political fields*—shaped by trends in global development assistance and Swedish development priorities—have influenced the institutional focus on poverty reduction and on the MDPA as an instrument for development strategies and operational work, primarily through reduced attention and shifting priorities.

Our analysis of Sida’s *organisational fields* - comprising Sida HQ/management, its specialised units, and Swedish embassies at the country level - shows that the procedures, rules, and regulations for conducting MDPAs are largely institutionalised and adhered to, although organisational challenges at the embassies affect their quality and suitability for operational work.

Regarding Sida staff and their agency, the MDPA approach and the importance of poverty reduction are largely institutionalised, accepted, and reproduced. At the same time, Sida staff possess different forms of *capital* (power/authority, knowledge, and relationships) as well as varying skills, dispositions, and ways of thinking (*habitus*). Their adherence to the MDPA instrument in its

current form therefore varies, as reflected in differing perceptions of its relevance and in their actions.

The degree to which a multidimensional view of poverty - and the MDPA model and process - is institutionalised at Sida in terms of practices, structures, norms, and behaviours, results from the interplay between policy directives and formal, rule-based organisational structures on the one hand, and the perceptions and agency of Sida units and individual staff on the other. While both the multidimensional view of poverty and the organisational structures and procedures for conducting MDPAs are largely institutionalised, their relevance has been influenced by shifting policy priorities and by varying perceptions among Sida staff regarding their practical utility.

7 Outcomes of the MDPA

The previous chapters have presented findings and data on the quality of MDPA reports; the process of making an MDPA; its contribution to a deeper understanding of local contexts and multidimensional poverty; its use in strategy development and portfolio management; and the extent to which the MDPA is institutionalised in Sida.

We are now at a stage where we can address Evaluation question 2: What outcomes have the MDPA led to – in terms of visible outcomes and as perceived by Sida staff? Have the conducted analyses been practically useful for prioritising – i.e. selecting and deselecting – sectors, directions, projects, or areas of work? Have other kinds of outcomes emerged?

We do this by using the findings from previous chapters to test the results chain and logic of the theory of change presented in Chapter 3. In line with our light-touch contribution analysis, this allows us to assess whether and how, or why not, the MDPA has contributed to making Swedish development cooperation more relevant and to fulfil its overall objective to “ensure the continued relevance of Sida’s contribution portfolio given how poverty is manifested and experienced” (Sida, 2017:21).

As part of the process, the tentative theory of change for the MDPA, presented in Chapter 3, has been revised based on data collected during the evaluation and is illustrated in Figure 12. In the figure, the extent to which there is support for results and assumptions in the data collected is indicated by the shading: the darker the green, the stronger the support. For example, there is evidence that the MDPA has been formally decided as Sida’s approach to assess and analyse poverty (Box R1). Sida staff is well informed about this, and there is ample instructions and guidance on what shall be included in an MDPA (Box R2, Assumption A1).

However, the guidance focuses more on the content than on the actual process of conducting the analysis. While there is ample access to guides and sources of information, a substantial share of respondents still finds the guidance and tools difficult and complex to use, and it remains unclear to many what the MDPA is ultimately meant to produce. The evaluation also finds that not all Sida country units chose to carry out an MDPA, and several have only done so once in the seven years of its existence. Hence there is less support for Assumption 2 and Result 3 (boxes R3 and A2 have lighter shades of green).

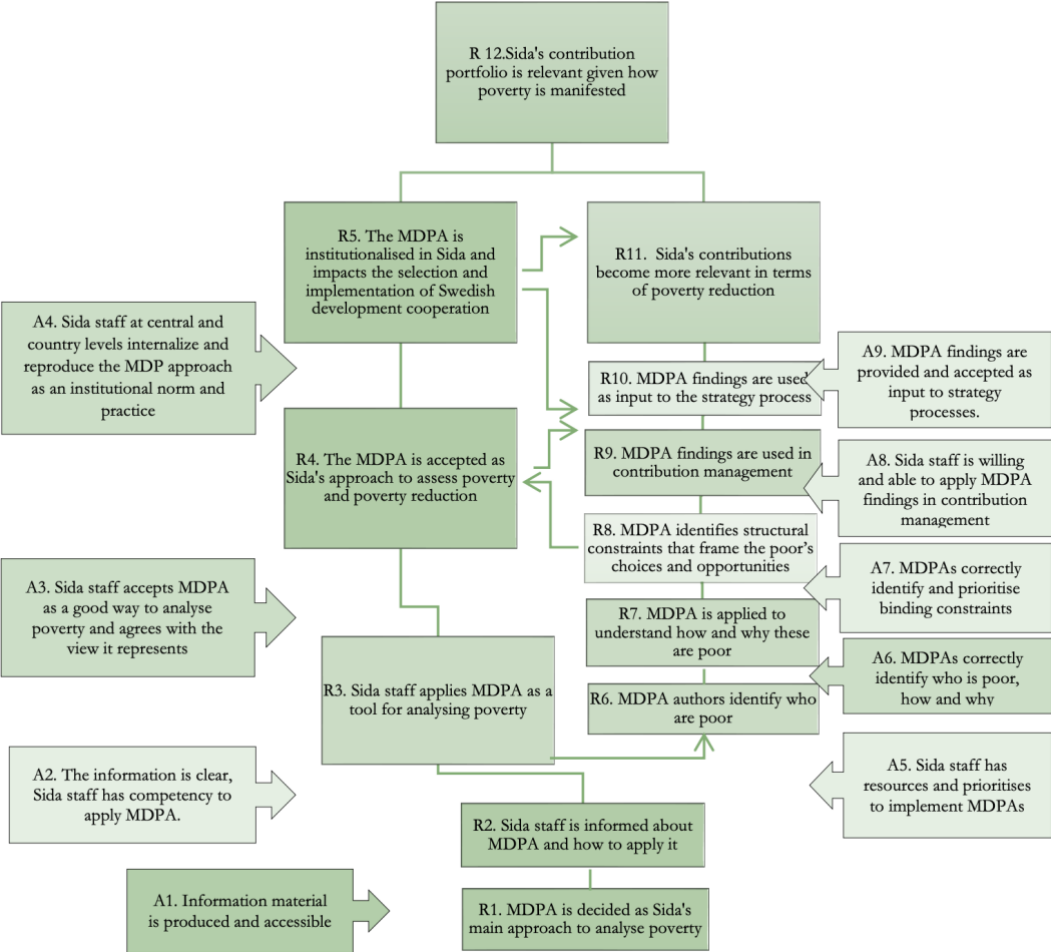
The data confirm that there are two main routes for how the MDPA contributes to outcomes. One is the formalised, documented process of steering aid via inputs to the strategy process and portfolio management (to the right in the theory of change), the other is the less tangible and informal route via internalisation and institutionalisation of the multidimensional poverty perspective by Sida staff and management (on the left).

There is a strong support for a multidimensional view on poverty among respondents, and, while some think the MDPA is overly work-intensive and abstract, it is accepted as the way to analyse poverty at Sida, and there is agreement on the multidimensional view it represents (Assumption 3, Result 4). As explained in Chapter 6, the evaluation finds that the MDPA, and the multidimensional approach to poverty and poverty reduction, has largely been institutionalised in Sida. (A3, R4)

There is a strong and coherent view on poverty and poverty reduction in Sida. Although a multidimensional view on poverty was present before the MDPA was introduced, it has contributed to an understanding of multidimensional poverty, and to keep this perspective on the agenda in Sida. As stated by survey and interview respondents, this perspective has, indirectly, had an impact on the work carried out by Sida staff (Result 5).

Figure 12: Revised theory of change for the MDPA

The boxes represent results (R), and assumptions (A). A darker shade of green implies stronger evidence in support of the statement in the box.



Moving to the right-hand side of the diagram, the evaluation found that although nearly all MDPA reports did identify who was poor, this was often done by presenting national-level data and resulted in broad and near all-encompassing groups being identified as poor. The analysis of the dimensions of poverty and development contexts

also often described the situation at country level, rather than assessing the situation from the perspectives of people living in poverty. This decreases the extent to which MDPAs were of practical use for e.g. prioritising among target populations. (R6, A6, R7)

Most of the later MDPAs reports identify binding constraints that frame the poor's choices and opportunities, but the constraints presented are often broad and to some extent compromises. Furthermore, the process of identifying binding constraints largely involved prioritisation and compromise and several respondents described it as not receiving enough attention. (A7, R8)

An explicit purpose of the MDPAs is to provide input to contribution management and strategy formation. Although interview, survey and document review data indicate this was the case in contribution management (R9), the visible, documented evidence of MDPAs findings in the strategy process is rather faint (R10). In-depth strategy reports are intended to consider MDPAs binding constraints, but these are often reformulated and not all are included. Furthermore, the in-depth strategy reports are only one of several considerations in the strategy formation process and the evaluation's comparison of strategy objectives with MDPAs binding constraints revealed quite scant overlap. (A8, A9, R9, R10)

The team did also identify some sources for potential negative effects from applying the MDPAs to steer aid. These include the time it consumes for Sida staff; challenges in communicating with partners who use different approaches to poverty reduction; and the risk of diverting attention from other approaches that may be more relevant in certain contexts, such as humanitarian emergencies.

In all, however, the team finds support for stating that the MDPAs contribute to making Sida's contributions and contribution portfolio more relevant to the overarching goal of poverty reduction defined by the Swedish parliament. As illustrated in figure 12, the two weakest links are Result 8: identification of structural constraints, and Result 10: input to the strategy process in the right-hand route.

Hence, the intended pathway via formalised input to the strategy process has been less successful while the contribution via enhanced understanding of multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction is stronger. (R11, R12)

The analyses conducted have been useful for prioritising, but perhaps mainly via the increased understanding of multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction, and poverty in the local contexts. The documented, direct application of the results of the analyses in terms of who is identified as poor, how and why, and what the binding constraints for poverty alleviation are, is less prominent.

Acknowledging the dual pathways of change that the MDPA has on Swedish development cooperation would help identifying the best approach to support its contribution and making it a more efficient tool. This argument is further developed as a recommendation in Chapter 10.

8 MDPA merit and value in steering aid

This chapter responds to the third evaluation question: What lessons may be learned as to the merit and value of the MDPA instrument in consciously steering Swedish bilateral aid towards poverty reducing interventions?

Sida has maintained its focus on poverty reduction as the ultimate goal of development cooperation, even though there are ongoing changes in global and Swedish development priorities. Following decades of changing poverty reduction paradigms and approaches, since 2017 Sweden's focus on poverty reduction has placed multidimensional poverty analyses at the core of its efforts.

As noted in the previous chapter, the MDPA is a model for understanding and relating to poverty and poverty reduction as well as an institutional process for keeping multidimensional poverty on the agenda. Below, we discuss in turn the merit of the model, the merit of the process and their value in steering Swedish development cooperation.

8.1 Merit and value of the MDPA model

The model itself reflects a global move towards a multidimensional view of poverty and what it means to be poor, starting in the early 1980s.

Sida's expansion of the understanding of poverty and the poor rested on the idea that, as poverty is multidimensional, its reduction will require a multidimensional analytical approach.

The model has obvious merits for understanding the multiple forces at hand both in creating and maintaining inequality and poverty. To some extent, it is also useful for identifying who is poor; however, as

applied, the groups identified are often too broad and encompassing to be practically useful. The model is less useful for understanding and analysing how poverty is understood and acted upon by the poor themselves.

The latter problem is both caused by the model's limited attention to individual agency and opportunities, as well as the relatively scant attention given to more local or participatory data. This is problematic as Swedish development cooperation during the period when the studied MDPAs were produced should be based on the perspectives of people living in poverty.

At the same time, the model is broad and complex, demanding a large amount of quantitative data for different sectors and themes acquired from international sources that vary in quality and relevance. Less emphasis is given to qualitative data and qual-quant analysis at the national/local level, which may be needed for a deeper understanding and analysis. Descriptive reports seem to be of less immediate value than more analytical ones and more easily find themselves in competition with other and more updated sources of information.

To facilitate analysis, updates and utilisation, the sources and amount of data in MDPAs could be reduced. Similarly, a better balance in the MDPAs between qualitative/quantitative data and description/analysis – including the perspective and agency of the poor – would enhance relevance and utility.

Less emphasis on generic conclusions and binding constraints and more emphasis on local embassy and country contexts would make it easier to tailor the MDPAs to Swedish as well as partner country priorities and increase utility in daily work.

More reader-friendly MDPAs, combining statistics with analysis and case-studies of the agency of people living in poverty, would make the MDPAs into more 'living documents' and enhance their relevance.

8.2 Merit and value of the MDPA process

The MDPA process is based on a set of guidelines and instructions, and the timing has been tied to the production of regional- or country-based strategies. The guidelines and instructions have developed from being relatively open and flexible to become more streamlined with explicit calls for operational conclusions.

The process of producing an MDPA is clear in the sense that its goal is to produce a tangible product in the form of a report or Power-Point presentation. While considered interesting and rewarding by most Sida staff, it is also considered time-consuming and stressful.

At the same time, the positioning of the MDPA process to Sweden's overall goal of poverty reduction in its development cooperation, as established by Parliament, political instructions from the Government (agendas) and administrative and operational procedures (strategies), is not evident to all Sida staff and affects the level of engagement and sense of purpose.

Furthermore, the variations in the way the MDPAs are carried out are a sign of flexibility but also jeopardise their coherence and utility for Sida as a whole. Comparisons and mutual learning between partner countries, within Sida units and between Sida staff may be negatively affected.

As the MDPA process intends to provide high-quality observations and input to strategy and operational processes, it would gain from being more streamlined and clearer in its role and relations to these. Furthermore, the use of external experts could facilitate/ease the process and reduce the burdens on Sida staff.

8.3 Steering aid towards poverty reduction

Major decisions on Swedish development cooperation are taken at the political level, most recently in the form of the Reform Agenda. Sida's task is to accommodate the overall goal of poverty reduction to this reality. Sida must also relate to ODA rules and regulations that cannot be overruled by national governments.

Maintaining a focus on poverty reduction as the overall objective of Swedish development cooperation will gain from – or may indeed depend on – a continued use of MDPAs or another carrier of the multidimensional perspective on poverty in policymaking, planning and implementation of Swedish aid.

The main formalised objective of the MDPAs has been their use as inputs to the Strategy process. Its explicit effect on contribution management and other aspects of Sida's daily work is limited. Still, many Sida staff (through interviews and the survey) insist that the MDPAs are used to a relatively large extent, as a general reference more than as an analytical model.

Despite variations in the extent to which the MDPA model and process have been understood and implemented and their visible operational implications, the instrument has been essential for maintaining Sida's (increasingly unique) focus on poverty reduction as the overarching goals of its development cooperation.

The continuation of such a focus will depend on a clarification of the position and role of the MDPA to two key areas: the strategy process, which used to be a main purpose of the MDPA but which has been removed with the Reform Agenda; and the new model for a 'Development Offer', which opens up for a new function for the MDPA in the coordination and follow up of different strategies and actors.

A more frequent use of the MDPA terminology – also in policy and strategy documents – would also help guide Swedish development cooperation towards fulfilling the overall goal of contributing to poverty reduction.

9 Conclusions

The evaluation has started from Sida's own description of the MDPA as an analytical framework for systematic multidimensional poverty analysis. Hence, it should be understood as an (indirect) steering instrument, where the purpose is to achieve an agency-wide framework for how poverty ought to be understood and assessed, and poverty reduction efforts programmed.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether, and to what extent, Swedish bilateral aid is consciously influenced and/or steered towards poverty reduction interventions using multidimensional poverty analyses. It has three more specific evaluation questions:

- 1) Has the multidimensional 'view on poverty' been institutionalised, and are staff adhering to the MDPA model and process? Does the MDPA practice lead to consensus within Sida as to what constitutes poverty and effective measures to reduce poverty?
- 2) What outcomes have the MDPA led to (in terms of visible outcomes as well as according to the perception among Sida staff)? Have the conducted analyses been practically useful for prioritising – select and deselect – sectors, directions, projects, or areas of work? Have other kinds of outcomes emerged?
- 3) What lessons may be learned as to the merit and value of the MDPA instrument in consciously steering Swedish bilateral aid towards poverty reducing interventions?

9.1 Institutionalisation, adherence and consensus

The multidimensional ‘view on poverty’ has largely been institutionalised and the MDPA practice has contributed to consensus within Sida as to what constitutes poverty and effective measures to reduce poverty. However, changing policy directives have reduced/confused the position of the MDPAs and staff are not fully adhering to the MDPA model and process.

Since its establishment in 2017, the MDPA approach has played an important role in steering Swedish aid towards the overall goal of poverty reduction and become well known at Sida. While rarely referred to at the level of MFA and the government’s policies and strategies for development cooperation and poverty reduction, Sida staff encounter and relate to MDPAs through a number of guidelines and instructions and in the process of producing MDPA reports. As such, the MDPA is institutionalised in Sida as an organisation.

There is also broad adherence to the general notion of ‘multi-dimensional poverty’ and the view that people living in poverty are affected by and have to live with multiple challenges they must relate to for upward social mobility or simply to stay alive. The understanding and adherence to this notion has been strengthened by the implementation and promotion of the MDPA, which has had an important role in keeping poverty and poverty reduction on the Sida agenda.

At the level of individual Sida staff members and their agency, the more explicit understanding and application of the MDPA process to assess poverty and the reasons for it is not internalised and reproduced to the same extent. The staff-members’ frequency and type of involvement in MDPAs vary, as do their perceptions about the objectives of the exercise and the extent to which they regard it as relevant for their work.

The main features of the MDPA model are generally known and acknowledged. At the same time, a majority of the reviewed MDPA reports are descriptive based on external datasets, which have varying quality and relevance. Analyses relating to the MDPA's causal relationships between the model's different components – as well as poor peoples' perspectives and agency – are hampered by the dearth of an explicit Theory of Change.

In sum, the notion of multidimensional poverty and the MDPA process have largely been institutionalised in the sense that staff relate to them as an integral part of working for Sida – even though ongoing policy-changes have put in question the MDPAs' more specific role. Actual adherence to the MDPA model and process vary, from Sida staff acting as 'champions' to drive the process forward at Sida HQ as well as at embassy level, to Sida staff not seeing the MDPA process as relevant for their daily work.

It is thus important to distinguish between the institutionalisation of the multidimensional approach to understanding poverty, and the MDPA model for assessing who is poor and how to identify key constraints that Swedish development cooperation may target.

9.2 Outcomes and utility

The documented (visible) outcomes of the MDPA model at strategy and operational levels are limited, but a common perception among staff is that MDPA reports and processes are used for prioritising and affects programming indirectly.

The practical use of MDPAs first of all varies with the position and status they are given in the process of making the development strategies that guide the work in a given country. The evaluation has found that explicit, documented effects at this level are limited. There are overlaps between strategy goals and identified constraints at a more general level but given the broad nature of both goals and constraints the link is at times tenuous.

It has also been difficult to trace direct links between MDPAs and prioritisations in the form of portfolio composition, contribution design and more specific target groups. Again, while there are overlaps, the broad nature of conclusions regarding who is poor, how and why, in the MDPAs makes it difficult to assess the extent of correlation.

What is not clear from the document review is if this correlation indicates a causal relationship, and if so in what direction. The analysis of the theory of change indicates that the relationship is causal, but not via the predicted route of MDPA reports being used as input to the strategy process, but rather via learnings from the MDPA process and the institutionalisation of the MDPA and a multidimensional perspective on poverty.

The MDPA has had both positive and negative effects on staff cohesion and well-being. The model has contributed to team-building and professional cohesion at the workplace, but also to stress and frustration due to increased workload and unclear instructions.

From the point of view of Sida staff, the utility of the MDPA process and of the MDPA approach in their daily work is affected by several factors: One is uncertainty about the extent to which the MDPA will feed into the country strategy, which is the basis for their work and prioritisations. A second is the issue of time constraints and competing priorities. And a third the immediate utility of the MDPAs in their daily work.

Still, the MDPA has an important role for most staff in keeping their focus on poverty reduction and multidimensional poverty in a changing ODA environment. Furthermore, the process of producing the MDPAs has had an important role for professional cohesion at Sida units at embassies, by increasing knowledge and understanding of multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction in the local context.

The institutionalisation of the MDPA has contributed to Sida's reputation as a partner who takes poverty reduction seriously.

The MDPA has had implications for relations with partners. Sida's focus on the MDPAs is an indication that Sida takes poverty reduction seriously – but the more explicit aspects of the MDPA are not prominent in partners' relations with Sida and few partners seem to have read or perused the documents themselves.

9.3 Influence on decision-making and the strategic direction of aid

The MDPA has influenced decision-making and the strategic direction both consciously and 'unconsciously'.

The term 'consciously influence' implies to intentionally and knowingly affect or shape something or someone – as opposed to just 'influence' which can happen unintentionally or without awareness.

The evaluation has shown that the MDPA model and process is the outcome of strategic choices by Sida HQ/Chief Economist Team to enhance and formalise the focus on poverty reduction in Sida through a multidimensional poverty lens. The approach is well known, and it is being used to a relatively large extent.

Still, its influence on the strategic direction of Swedish aid and decision-making at country/embassy level is affected by overarching political/policy concerns by changing governments and 'competing' strategies and other priorities at the level of implementation. The evaluation has also shown that the MDPAs' findings do not always reach the strategy process.

However, as illustrated in the theory of change in chapter 7, the MDPA also has other, less explicit and documented, implications for Sweden and Sida's continued focus on poverty reduction and multidimensional poverty.

Through its effect on unit cohesion, joint learning and internalisation of the multidimensional understanding of poverty at the group level, the MDPA has an indirect effect on the structure of Swedish bilateral aid and for maintaining and signalling a continued commitment to a conception of poverty that goes beyond resource poverty.

Sida's MDPA model is holistic, comprehensive, and potentially useful for identifying the dynamics of multidimensional poverty and informing poverty alleviation efforts.

The model is meant to identify who is poor, why they are poor and how poverty is manifested – with the explicit applied purpose of guiding Sweden's development policy and practice.

Our review of the MDPA reports (see Chapter 4.1) indicates that while the overall description of context and the dimensions of poverty generally are well done, the causal mechanisms required for the identification of the binding constraints and the understanding of the perspective and agency of people living in poverty are less convincing - the former because there is no real theoretical/analytical foundation for the analyses and the latter because there are limited options in the MDPA process for incorporating the type of grounded and participatory analysis required.

The model also lacks an analytical component to assess the relation between structural (or binding) constraints, power and the agency of people living in poverty. While poverty is largely determined by structural forces and oppression, poor people's social relations (of power, class, gender, ethnicity etc.) and their agency are vital for their options for upward social mobility (see Jones and Tvedten 2019).

In the current situation, in which partner countries face a general reduction of development funds, the question of understanding and prioritising the groups most in need takes on extreme urgency. While being potentially useful, the MDPA model in its current form and application does not fully serve this purpose.

The MDPA achieves its purpose – to increase the poverty relevance of Swedish development cooperation – by a combination of different uses and objectives.

The Terms of References for this evaluation includes a set of questions concerning the ultimate purpose of Sida's multidimensional poverty analysis approach (EBA 2024:3):

“Is this an instrument for strategic planning of interventions or, alternatively, a mechanism mainly used for internal building of competence? Is it a way for the agency to put focus on the overriding objective of Swedish development cooperation (poverty reduction), given the multitude of government priorities? Or is it a tool for building internal consensus around the general direction of programs, and thereby train its staff in contextual analysis? Is it an instrument for increasing the shares of interventions directly benefitting people living in poverty, or to make aid more effective in reducing poverty (which may include indirect effects)?”

This evaluation has shown that the MDPA process and its outcomes – to varying degrees and with varying success – have elements of all these aspects. This is – in many ways – the MDPA's strength as well as its weakness.

10 Recommendations

While not a request in the terms of reference for this evaluation, the evaluation team nevertheless wishes to share some suggestions for how the MDPA could be made into a more relevant, efficient and effective tool for steering Swedish development cooperation. They build on the conclusion that the MDPA should remain an important tool for fulfilling the overall objective of Swedish development cooperation – established and annually iterated by the Swedish Parliament: to contribute to improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression.

Develop a Theory of Change for the MDPA

The MDPAs have helped maintain a focus on poverty reduction in Swedish development cooperation and instilled a broad understanding of the value and relevance of a multidimensional view on poverty.

At the same time, the MDPAs have had limited explicit implications for country strategies, aid portfolios and individual contributions at country level – with the MDPA rather having an indirect impact through its acceptance/internalisation among Sida staff.

This dual purpose of the MDPA is not very clear, though, and neither is the way that the MDPA intends to contribute to these two purposes, or how the combined effect on Swedish development cooperation shall be achieved. As noted in the report, there are instructions and guides for how to implement the MDPA, but less so for how to use it. There is hence a need to review the MDPA model and what it aims to achieve, and to identify the most effective and efficient way to achieve it.

For this reason, Sida is recommended to develop a thorough theory of change for the MDPA – including both an ‘internal’ theory of change of the MDPA model itself, and an ‘impact’ theory of change describing how the MDPA is intended to have an impact on Swedish

development cooperation. The theory of change depicted in Chapter 7 of this report could be used for inspiration for the ‘impact’ theory of change. An outline of an ‘internal’ theory of change could be that: by creating an understanding for who is poor, how and why, it is possible to identify the binding constraints that prevent poverty alleviation, and which of these that can be affected by Swedish development cooperation on reducing these constraints. With the addition of the ‘Development Offer’, this information is combined with information about available resources and synergies across strategies, to identify the most efficient way to deal with the binding constraints.

As part of developing the theory of change, the position and use of the MDPA should be clarified for i) strategy development; iii) the development offer; iv) operational work; v) internal Sida communication; and vi) communication with partners.

The theory of change and the MDPA model should, at regular intervals, be reviewed to assess if changes are needed to increase their contribution to a continued Sida focus on people living in poverty and under oppressions in Sweden’s countries of cooperation.

Be explicit about the dual purpose of the MDPA

While the explicit use of the MDPAs for setting priorities and shaping outcomes in Swedish development cooperation is important, this focus has made the MDPA appear overly cumbersome and costly relative to its benefits. Placing more emphasis on the indirect way the MDPA influences decision-making – through fostering learning and deepening understanding of multidimensional poverty – could help build a stronger case and greater motivation for investing in the MDPA processes.

Clarifying this would shift the cost-benefit analysis conducted by Sida units when considering whether to carry out an MDPA, helping them determine what to prioritise and how to tailor the MDPA to their needs. Additionally, placing this purpose at the centre of devel-

oping tools and guidance development could steer these resources in a direction that more effectively supports those implementing MDPAs.

Clarify and integrate the use of MDPAs in Sida

To clarify and strengthen the impact of the MDPA, Sida could take the following steps:

Key terminology of the MDPA framework – including structural context, poverty dimensions, people living in poverty, binding constraints, poor people's agency – should also be systematically employed in other parts of Sida's work, e.g. in reporting and planning systems.

Initiatives should be taken to open for mutual learning and discussions between Sida units at HQ and embassies and between the latter. MDPAs should be easily accessible, and a particular internet-based discussion forum should be considered.

The MDPAs should be more systematically used in communication with development partners both in Sweden (incl. NGOs and private sector) and in the countries of cooperation (government, civil society, private sector, academia).

Revisit the format and role of the MDPA

As a result of developing the theory of change for the MDPA, Sida should review the MDPA model to maximise its potential impact. Below are four alternative ways to adapt the MDPA – each representing a different approach – to make it more useful for a continued focus on multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction within Swedish development cooperation. The four approaches, along with key content and considerations related to the MDPA, is provided in more detail in Annex 5.

Strengthened MDPA

The first model – based on the assumption that the MDPA should play a decisive role in fulfilling the overarching goal of contributing to improved living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppressions – would be to reinforce the position and role of the MDPA in government steering documents, in strategy processes and for operational work. A revised MDPA, that should reflect the dynamics of poverty and poverty reduction and include actionable conclusions, should be compulsory to do for all Sweden's countries of cooperation.

Downscaled MDPA

The second model develops the MDPA into a more analytical, focused and simplified tool that places less burden for Sida and its staff. Its purpose is to contribute to the overarching goal of poverty reduction by informing the strategy process and operational work at country level. This version of the MDPA maintains a focus on structural constraints and people living in poverty by narrowing the range of quantitative data, incorporating more qualitative insights to demonstrate the agency of poor people, and shifting the emphasis from description to analysis. It would become a more dynamic, living document – regularly discussed and updated at embassies as well as with partners.

Operational MDPA

The third model primarily sees the MDPA as a tool for operationalisation, target group identification and follow-up within the specific sectors outlined in the strategy. It serves to promote greater integration across the various sectors in which Sida is active. The analysis would place greater emphasis on the perspectives, agency and opportunities of people living in poverty, while assigning less weight to structural variables. By being more focused, the analysis becomes

easier to integrate into Sida's contribution management and reporting systems.

Collective Learning MDPA

The fourth model emphasizes the MDPA's role in fostering learning, collective exchange, and strategic discussion related to poverty reduction in the local context. This MDPA is not tied the strategy process but functions as a continuous tool for assessment, discussion and learning. Its explicit purpose is to create opportunities for ongoing discussions among relevant strategy owners. These discussions would follow the MDPA model while also increasing attention to Sida's perspectives and identifying potential synergies between different strategies at the country level. It would also serve as a valuable tool for informing the proposed "development offers".

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relevance*, Anders Olofsgård

Behind every country aid strategy, Sida has made a multidimensional poverty analysis. This evaluation investigates what these have led to.

Bakom varje bilateral biståndsstrategi finns en multidimensionell fattigdomsanalys som Sida tagit fram. Denna utvärdering undersöker vad analyserna har lett till.