

Operational strategy

This document describes the operational strategy of the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA). The strategy outlines the long-term direction of EBA's activities and its future work. The criteria underlying EBA's priorities are also presented. The strategy is revised annually. The long-term direction of EBA's activities remains unchanged, but the focus of its future work will build on the experience gained during its first period of activity. EBA's working methods are described in a separate document.

EBA's terms of reference form the basis of its work. Under the terms of reference, EBA is to evaluate and analyse Sweden's international aid in order to improve aid and build up a long-term, high-quality knowledge base. EBA's task is to commission, compile, implement and communicate evaluations, analyses and studies on the implementation, performance and efficiency of aid. Through its work, EBA will contribute to broadening and deepening the supporting data for a continuous improvement of aid policy.

The long-term direction of activities

EBA's activities aim to help improve Sweden's international aid and build up a high-quality knowledge base. The studies¹ that EBA commissions should be such that they can influence political decisions primarily in Sweden, but also internationally. One of EBA's overall objectives is to evaluate and analyse the ability of aid to create opportunities for better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression.

Aid covers a broad area, stretching over many sectors of society and covering a large number of countries and organisations. This is why aid needs to be examined from many perspectives. And the role of aid in a wider context, as part of global development, must not be forgotten either. From an overall perspective, at least three questions can be identified that are relevant in the long term:

- What are the reasons for aid?
- What direction should Sweden's aid take?
- How should aid activities be managed and organised?

¹ We use 'studies' as an umbrella term for the projects EBA commissions, i.e. studies include evaluations, analyses and other types of knowledge bases.

What are the reasons for aid? This includes questions such as when aid can make a difference as well as what the reasons behind – and the objectives of – the aid that is given have been.

What direction should Sweden's aid take? This includes what the accumulated knowledge from research, evaluation and proven experience say about the direction aid should take, how it should be implemented and evaluated, and how international agreements and standards that Sweden has committed itself to following relate to this knowledge.

How should aid activities be managed and organised? This includes the coordination and organisation of aid in Sweden and internationally. Other questions of interest include how efficient the current management is and how well-functioning, high-quality and cost-effective activities can best be achieved.

The long-term direction of EBA's activities takes its cue from these questions, which should be tackled from the perspective of both the donor country and the recipient country.

The operational strategy is a starting point for EBA's work. EBA is nonetheless open to outside views on questions that should be addressed and studies that should be carried out. Which studies will be carried out also depends on the availability of authors. Various methods may be used to find suitable authors for EBA's reports. Advertising is appropriate for certain issues, while in other cases EBA actively seeks out potential authors. An important role of the expert group is ensuring that the studies carried out are of high standard.

A vital part of EBA's work is to maintain an active network with leading organisations that analyse and evaluate aid. EBA will cooperate with other actors in cases when it is deemed relevant and effective for carrying out the studies.

Future work

EBA's future work will focus on the implementation and results of development aid. These issues are interlinked by the fact that the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing aid are essential to its results.

Implementation of aid

EBA has an important role to fill in making existing knowledge on implementing aid available. The overall approach of aid policy is described in the aid policy framework adopted in March 2014, and is governed by the Government's results strategies for aid². Examples of questions EBA intends to address include where the aid goes, how it is implemented, how the coordination between actors is organised and whether the current management leads to the desired results and helps create cost-effective aid activities.

One central aspect of aid implementation is the choice of channel and form of the aid. Sweden's aid is provided via many different channels (Swedish and international organisations, bilaterally to partner countries, multilateral organisations including the EU, and the private sector). How aid is channelled has an impact on the effects and results the aid can achieve, and this is therefore an important area for EBA to study. Different channels have different advantages and disadvantages and raise more questions, such as what incentive problems exist for different actors, how the efficiency of an aid organisation should be measured, whether different channels are differently suited to different types of

² In connection with the 2014 Statement of Government Policy, the new Government announced that in the coming year the aid policy framework would be reviewed, which particularly brings the issue of aid management to the fore.

aid contributions and to what extent the choice of channel is governed by objectives other than aid policy objectives. Aid is also provided in different forms (a rough division is to differentiate between project support, programme support and budget support) and via different instruments, such as gifts, loans or various types of financial guarantees. EBA has a role in evaluating and analysing how various forms and instruments have been used and which should be chosen for different types of contributions.

Another important part of aid implementation is the question of at which level – national, EU or international – aid should be managed. This in turn is linked to the role of aid in a wider discussion on global development. Public aid is merely a tool for contributing to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Many challenges of relevance for people in low income countries are global issues that must be dealt with beyond the borders of an individual country and with resources outside the national aid budget. It is therefore important for EBA to provide analyses of how public aid should be coordinated with other sources of financing, such as aid provided by private actors and contributions made in other policy areas within the framework of a coherent policy for global development in order to deal with different regional and global challenges.

The results of aid

When considering the results of aid, attention must be given to questions concerning how individual forms of aid and financing mechanisms work as well as those concerning the extent to which the goals adopted for aid policy have been achieved. Attention must also be given to which methods should be used to evaluate the results of individual aid contributions and of aid more generally.

What is of primary interest is knowledge on the long-term impacts of the activities conducted, not evaluations of design and implementation or immediate outputs or outcomes of individual projects or programmes. Various forms of evaluation are possible. One form is meta-analyses aimed at answering questions such as which type of aid contributions in a specific area the evaluations have found to work or not to work. Other forms of evaluation include country studies aimed at analysing the impact of long-term development cooperation and thematic studies.

The following are examples of questions of interest. What evidence exists that specific forms of aid-funded interventions achieve desired development impacts? What evidence exists to show that certain interventions are destructive? Where, when, how and why do some interventions 'work'? How are activities organised so that new knowledge is created and developed for continued learning? What knowledge exists regarding the impact of various forms of management? Possible approaches to the latter question are studies on how the transition from country strategies to results strategies has affected aid activities, the extent to which results reporting governs the direction of aid and how the results reporting requirements in the strategies are satisfied.

Criteria for priorities in EBA's activities

The priorities between the many different potential studies covered by EBA's fundamental questions should be determined by the importance of the studies for both long-term *knowledge-building* and more short-term *policy relevance*. Policy relevance means that EBA's studies are to be relevant and applicable for political decision-makers. This does not mean that every report must contain direct policy recommendations. Nonetheless, one objective is that studies that do not result in direct recommendations should lead to long-

term knowledge-building and thus also serve as a basis for further studies that in turn could result in recommendations.

The *topicality* of the question will also be of importance when determining which studies will be carried out. EBA is intended to contribute to the debate on the development of Swedish aid, which means that implemented studies must be linked to developments within the aid field.

A further criterion for EBA's work is that the study's scope represents a *significant share of the aid budget* or is expected to have a *significant impact*. In addition, there are issues that neither affect a large share of the aid budget nor can be said to have major financial consequences in any other respect, but that are *relevant to the principles* of aid. One example is ethical issues linked to aid. Another example is the accessibility of information about the amount of resources Sweden provides to various purposes and how much of these resources are actually used to meet these purposes.

Duplication of work must be avoided. Many actors carry out research, evaluations and analyses in the area of aid, and it is important to make use of all available knowledge when prioritising studies. EBA should therefore carry out active international monitoring to identify areas where the need for additional knowledge is particularly great. There is a need to compile and refine the knowledge and results that already exist and translate the results from research and evaluations into relevant policy conclusions. In areas where there is a lack of relevant knowledge, it may be necessary to conduct more extensive projects. Access to resources will determine the extent to which more resource-intensive projects may be possible.

Focus of operations in 2015

In 2015, EBA plans to publish studies on both the implementation of aid and the results achieved. Several studies on how aid is implemented in various sectors, such as democracy and climate, are already planned. In addition, more comprehensive studies of international reform cooperation and the role of institutions in aid are also planned. Regarding the results of aid, EBA plans to publish synthesis evaluations that bring together existing knowledge from robust evaluations.

EBA seeks to publish studies in topical areas with a clear relevance to decision-makers, and also canvasses decision-makers, authors and others for proposals for studies. EBA also conducts regular, active international monitoring to identify interesting research of relevance to Swedish aid. All in all, this means the studies planned for the coming year may change. It may also mean that EBA may also organise seminars on topics for which there are not yet any EBA reports. Moreover, the point in time at which various planned studies are carried out and published depends on the availability of the authors.