

The Expert group's operational strategy

This document describes the strategy concerning the activities that the expert group has chosen in order to carry out its remit. It is about *what* should be done – which issues should be addressed, what types of evaluations and analyses should be carried out, what should be communicated and which debate the expert group should contribute to. This strategy will be developed and amended over time. Related to this strategy is a document outlining *how* the group works. The expert group's operational strategy should be seen in light of the fact that there are several actors that analyse and evaluate Sweden's international aid in various ways, including the Government, the Swedish National Audit Office and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The aim of the expert group's activities is to help develop Sweden's international aid and build up a high-quality knowledge base on aid issues. The studies¹ that the expert group carries out should be such that they can influence political decisions, primarily in Sweden but also in international forums and recipient countries.

The Expert group's remit (ToR 2013:11)

The basis of the expert group's work are the terms of reference. The terms of reference state that the expert group shall continuously

evaluate and analyse Sweden's international development cooperation in order to improve development cooperation and build up a long-term high-quality knowledge base.

It also states the following:

¹ We use studies as an umbrella term for the projects the expert group has commissioned, i.e. studies covering evaluations, analyses and other types of knowledge base.

The remit of the expert group is to commission, compile, implement and communicate evaluations, analyses and studies on the implementation, performance and efficiency of development cooperation.

And:

Through its work, the expert group will contribute to broadening and deepening the supporting data to ensure the continuous improvement of development cooperation policy.

The long-term direction of activities

The remit is broad; aid is an extensive area that is undergoing change and needs to be looked at from many different perspectives, including its role in a wider context. From an overall perspective, at least three questions can be identified that are relevant in the long-term, namely:

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

The long-term direction of the expert group's activities takes its cue from these three questions. A recurrent theme that is key to all three questions is the results and impact of aid. The questions should be seen from the perspective of both the donor country and the recipient.

What are the motives for aid?

This question covers issues concerning why aid is needed, when aid can make a difference, when aid should be given and also what have been the reasons behind – and the objectives of – the aid that is given.

Examples of questions about why aid is needed include why are people poor, what is meant by saying that someone is poor and under what circumstances and in what way can aid help poor people to improve their living conditions? Central to when aid can make a difference are questions about the results and impact of aid. Examples of questions concerning when aid should be given include what are the advantages and disadvantages of aid in relation to other measures?

There have been many objectives at various levels of Swedish aid, which has led to questions about how different Swedish aid contributions have been justified and what governs the shape

aid takes in practice, e.g. how aid contributions have been distributed across various areas, such as humanitarian support, education, democracy, health care, etc. One principle question is how different objectives and the number of objectives affect the possibility of evaluating aid policy and its effectiveness.

What direction should Sweden's aid take?

Given the objectives of aid, the question is what direction Swedish aid should take and how it should be evaluated. What does the accumulated knowledge from research, evaluation and proven experience say about what direction aid should take and how it should be implemented in various situations and contexts? Where do the different international agreements and standards that Sweden has signed up to stand in relation to this knowledge? What methods are available to evaluate the results and impact of private aid contributions and aid in a more aggregate way? Does the accumulated knowledge have implications concerning which countries and sectors aid should be directed at or what form aid should take? What is the quality of Sweden's aid, is aid given in accordance with current knowledge about how aid should be targeted and implemented, and are the best methods being used for follow-up and evaluation?

Sweden's public aid goes through many different channels (private Swedish and international organisations, bilaterally to partner countries, multilateral organisations including the EU, and the private sector). This raises questions about the advantages and disadvantages of different channels, e.g. what the incentive problems of different actors are, how the efficiency of an aid organisation should be measured, whether different channels are differently suited to different types of aid contribution and to what extent the choice of channel is governed by objectives other than aid policy objectives.

Aid is also provided in different forms (project support, programme support and budget support) and through different instruments, e.g. donations, credits or guarantees. This raises questions about what form and what instruments should be chosen for different types of contributions, i.e. what are the right conditions for different types of aid?

How should aid activities be managed and organised?

Once the direction and evaluation of aid have been determined, the question is how aid activities should be managed, coordinated and organised in Sweden, internationally and in the recipient countries, and how efficient the current management is. How do we best achieve effi-

cient activities of high quality and aid administration that is cost-effective, i.e. how do we achieve the objectives of aid for as low a cost as possible? What are the advantages and disadvantages in the different contexts of aid implementation being divided among several actors, the Government, an agency, the EU, international organisations and private organisations, compared with central administration concentrated on one actor? What is the added value of numerous channels and actors? The question of how aid activities should be shaped so as to be as appropriate as possible is relevant when it comes to both administering a certain accumulated amount of aid funds and financing private contributions.

Closely related to the question of which aid forms are the most appropriate is the question of which level aid should be administered at – national, EU or international. What are the advantages and disadvantages of coordinating different aid contributions?

Another question is how public aid can best be coordinated with aid provided by private actors and other policy areas within the framework of a coherent policy for global development?

Criteria for priorities in the expert group's activities

The priorities set between the many different studies that fall under these 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 the expert group's studies should be relevant and applicable to political decision-makers. However, this does not necessarily mean that each report must contain direct policy recommendations. Nonetheless, studies that do not result in direct recommendations should lead to long-term knowledge-building and thus also serve as a good basis for follow-up studies that could result in policy recommendations.

The *relevance* of the question will also take priority; the expert group is to contribute to the debate on the development of Swedish aid. The impact of a study on political decisions can sometimes be direct, but it can also be more long-term through the public debate.

One criterion for evaluating aid activities is that the activities represent a *significant share of the aid budget* or are 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 are of *principal importance* to aid. One example is ethical issues connected to aid. Another example is the level of access to information on how much money Sweden gives to various causes and how much of the money ‘disappears’ en route.

Duplication of work must be avoided. Many actors carry out research, evaluations and analyses in this field, and it is important to make use of all the knowledge available. The expert group is to carry out active international monitoring to identify areas where the need for relevant decision-making data is particularly great. Ongoing projects and access to already existing decision-making data within an area will be considered when prioritising studies. Despite the number of studies carried out on aid, there seems to have been little light shed on the area as the picture is fragmented and confused by detail. There is therefore a need to bring together and refine the knowledge and results that already exist and translate the results from research and other studies into relevant policy conclusions. In areas where there is a lack of relevant knowledge, it may be necessary to conduct more extensive and long-term projects. Access to resources will determine the extent to which more resource-intensive projects can be conducted.

The operational strategy will be a starting point for the expert group’s work. The expert group is nonetheless open to input based on the questions that should be highlighted and studies that should be conducted. Which studies will be conducted will in effect depend on availability of authors – whether a researcher/s or expert/s that has/have expertise with respect to a certain question and also has/have the time to write a report for the expert group. Various methods could be used to identify these authors. For some of the questions it may be appropriate to advertise the assignment, but in most cases a great deal of international monitoring will be necessary to find the people who have the expertise to approach the questions. Another aspect that will determine whether or not a question should lead to a study is whether it is possible to answer the question with the available data, known methods and proven experience.

Initial activities

There is a great need for meta-studies and surveys to consolidate the knowledge that exists, but that is currently fragmented. More specific studies can also be conducted in cases where the expert group comes into contact with people with specialist knowledge in a particular area

that is worth shedding light on. Moreover, the expert group can choose to advertise or procure studies in areas in which the expert group has procurement expertise.

Knowledge needs to be collated about the fundamental questions that are linked to the Riksdag's objectives for Sweden's international development cooperation – 'to help create the conditions for poor people to improve their living conditions'. In order to understand how aid can lead to reduced poverty and why aid is needed for poor people to be able to improve their living conditions, a review is needed of research into why people are poor, what obstacles exist stopping them from lifting themselves out of poverty and why they fall back into poverty if they have managed to escape it. Part of this is a review of what drives development and how development affects poor people, and the link between aid and e.g. economic growth, social development, democracy and human rights, and poverty reduction. One sub-question is whether aid has a catalytic role to play, and if so, in what context. Another sub-question is what significance the quality of institutions has on development and poverty reduction, and how aid can impact on quality and how this can be measured.

To evaluate whether Sweden's aid improves the living conditions of poor people, we need to analyse how the term 'poverty' is used and how poverty should be measured. This requires a survey and analysis of the data and statistics for measuring poverty, development and living conditions, and of what various measurements can say about development over time.

In the Budget Bill for 2014, the Government has proposed that the objective be amended to 'improved living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression'. This raises questions about how these objectives relate to each other, how 'oppression' should be defined and whether – and how – aid is an effective means of reducing oppression.

To evaluate whether Sweden's aid is being given in line with what the research says about what role aid can play for poor (and oppressed) people in order to improve their living conditions, a survey is necessary on where Sweden's aid is going. Such a survey – a long-term one – is also necessary to find out whether aid is and has been in harmony with the aid policy objectives. However, Sweden's aid is also governed by international standards, declarations and recommendations that Sweden has signed up to. This should be considered in such a survey. A survey should also be carried out to find out how aid contributions have been re-categorised over the years. This is because such re-categorisations make it difficult to measure results.

The efficiency of the channels used to supply Swedish aid funding needs to be evaluated, and it should be examined whether Sweden's aid has been provided in harmony with the results. As an ever larger proportion of aid is given via multilateral organisations, it is appropriate to begin by analysing the efficiency of this channel. Another issue to analyse is the extent of administrative costs and any added value when an aid contribution is channelled in several stages.

A survey should be conducted on what research and proven experience say are the best evaluation methods and which methods are suitable for the evaluation of different measures. Moreover, a survey should be conducted into whether evaluations of Sweden's aid are carried out using relevant and well-tested methods. One issue that also needs to be investigated is how the implementation of aid should be organised to enable relevant evaluations of high quality to be conducted and to contribute to improving activities. It should be possible to learn lessons in this regard from how learning organisations in other areas have been created.

Cooperation with other actors

There are many actors working in the field of aid analysis and evaluation. In the longer term, it may be an effective measure for the expert group to take part in joint projects, but the expert group must first have established the structure of its work and become a well-known actor in the area.