Memorandum

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**Expert Group for Aid Studies**

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***FAQs about the EBA***

This document contains frequently asked questions about the EBA. Has your question not been answered here? Send an email to us at: [ud.eba@gov.se](mailto:ud.eba@gov.se)

The EBA evaluates and analyses – what does that mean?

The Government sees a need for independent examinations of central government activities. The term the Government uses for monitoring, analysis and evaluation conducted by authorities other than other those responsible for the activity is ‘analysis and evaluation resources’. The EBA has this function for Sweden’s international development assistance. Under our terms of reference, we are to “regularly evaluate and analyse Sweden’s international development assistance”.

But what then is meant by ‘evaluate and analyse’? What sets the two terms apart?

The EBA uses what is perhaps the most common definition of ‘evaluation’: “a systematic inquiry into the worth or merit of an object” (originally from the American Evaluation Association (AEA)). ‘Worth or merit’ means that a value judgement must be made. ‘Systematic’ means that the value judgement must build on an openly reported, science-based examination.

The term ‘analyse’ is somewhat trickier. According to a definition taken from theoretical science, ‘analysis’ deals with breaking down a problem by looking at its component parts. Its opposite would be ‘synthesis’. The EBA uses a more general understanding of the term, more along the lines of a thorough examination.

Beyond this, the EBA produces other knowledge-based data, such as surveys, reviews, methodology or documented discussions.

‘Studies’ is used as an umbrella term for the projects commissioned by the EBA. We call the main publication form simply ‘EBA reports’. The description of each report specifies what type of study it is. In addition, the EBA has two publication series that are not subject to quality control by the Expert Group: background reports and Development Dissertation Briefs (DDB).

Expert Group for Aid Studies

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## How do you ensure that what you do is relevant?

A constant challenge for independent evaluation actors is to combine the independent approach with relevance and use. Ensuring relevance requires high quality and continuity in dialogue with target groups, both regarding what is studied and while conducting the analysis. A dialogue of this kind may be combined with an independent approach. The EBA has various forms of dialogue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs concerning studies that are planned, while they are being conducted and after they have been launched. We also conduct regular dialogue with other target groups, primarily the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The term ‘policy relevance’ means that the EBA’s studies are to contribute to in-depth data to support the design of aid policy. Policy relevance is one of five criteria for the EBA’s assessment of proposals (along with knowledge-building, topicality, share of the aid budget/significant impact and relevance to the principles of aid). Studies may be considered relevant without having a high ranking in the area of policy relevance. Such studies (e.g. knowledge about insufficient evidence in an area) can lead to questions that more directly impact policy relevance (e.g. efforts to produce such evidence). Another example of indirect relevance is method reports, where the EBA creates better opportunities for evaluators to use methodology, for administrators to request or evaluate methods when procuring and for MFA officials to benefit from evaluations that use specific methods. In this way, more high-quality impact evaluations of Swedish aid can be carried out than the EBA can conduct on its own.

# Do you always provide clear recommendations?

One of the fundamental goals of the EBA’s activities is that it should be possible to use the studies conducted for designing policy. But the EBA’s reports do not always contain ‘recommendations’ in the sense of clear proposals for measures. It depends on the study’s purpose and the relevant issue. The EBA’s authors are responsible for their own conclusions and any recommendations made.

**How do you choose the subjects of your studies?**

The EBA cannot study all areas at the same time; instead, we try to give priority to questions or themes that are considered particularly relevant at any given period. ‘Priority area’ means that the Expert Group systematically tries to produce studies within these themes. In addition, the EBA also conducts studies in other areas.

Overall, the EBA’s questions can be divided into three categories: (i) the purpose and long-term direction of aid; (ii) the priorities and governance of aid; and (iii) the implementation of aid. The results of aid are an integrated part of these three questions. Do the direction, priorities, governance and implementation contribute to the intended and desired results?

What factors contribute to successful aid initiatives, and what factors counteract them? Are the direction, priorities, governance and implementation appropriate in relation to the accumulated knowledge from research, evaluation and proven experience? Have set goals been achieved?

# How does the EBA initiate studies?

The EBA’s studies are usually conducted by those who drafted the proposal. This can occur via ‘spontaneous’ responses to the EBA’s public invitation on its website, following a targeted call for interest or via broader calls for proposals. When the EBA procures a large study, the project proposal is usually relatively limited regarding details on methodology and specific direction. The EBA tries to provide scope for the person proposing a project to allow their own experience, expertise and ideas to influence the design of the proposal.

## Who is responsible for the conclusions in an EBA report?

Authors of EBA studies are responsible for their own analyses, conclusions and any recommendations. The Expert Group conducts quality control of each study and determines whether or not to publish it.