



The Expert Group for Aid Studies

Invitation for proposals: Evaluation of Swedish aid in Sub-Saharan Africa via CSOs

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee mandated to evaluate and analyse the direction, governance, and implementation of Sweden's official development assistance (ODA). EBA engages researchers and other experts to carry out studies of relevance for policymakers and practitioners.

The EBA has decided to commission an evaluation of Swedish CSO-aid focused on democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Background and motivation for the study

The Swedish Government's Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance states:

As development actors, shapers of opinion and advocates, civil society organisations perform an important function by making proposals, and scrutinising and demanding accountability from states and public institutions. Their capacity to work at the local level enables people living in poverty and under oppression to influence their own living conditions themselves and exercise influence in political processes and decisions. Civil society organisations can thus contribute towards a democratic culture and are crucial to the rights perspective. Civil society organisations can also serve an important bridge-building function in relation to other actors, not least political parties and institutions whose participation is necessary to consolidate democratic change processes initiated by civil society."

Regarding the long-term policy direction, the Government states: "Safeguarding human rights will continue to be a cornerstone of Swedish development cooperation." And that "Sweden will work to build and strengthen democratic forms of government and institutions" and "work to counteract the shrinking space for civil society. Freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly must be defended, and human rights defenders are to be supported."

The current Strategy for support via Swedish civil society organisations for the period 2016–2022 states that the strategy is to "contribute to strengthened capacity among civil society actors in developing countries, and a more enabling environment for civil society organisations in developing countries." This is expected to lead to "Increased

impact of the rights perspective in the work of civil society organisations” and “greater awareness, engagement and capacity among people living in poverty, enabling them to work for democracy and to organise in order to assert their human rights.” The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) states that its appropriation for assistance via Swedish civil society organisations seeks to strengthen civil society in partner countries through strengthened capacity and a more favourable societal climate.

The strategy objectives in nine African country strategies (Table 1) confirm a strong focus on capacity building in civil society but also on a role of demanding accountability, scrutiny and influence for democracy and human rights.

Table 1: Objectives of particular relevance in nine Swedish country strategies

Country strategy	Objectives
Mozambique	“Stronger capacity in civil society to work for openness, demanding accountability and greater respect for human rights.”
Rwanda	“Greater opportunities for poor and marginalised groups and for defenders and advocates of democracy to participate in and influence processes that promote democracy and human rights, including conflict prevention.”
Uganda	“Improved conditions for women, men, girls and boys to influence political processes, demand accountability and have their human rights met.”
Burkina Faso	“Stronger capacity in civil society to work for openness, accountability and greater respect for human rights, democracy and the principle of the rule of law.”
DRC	“Greater respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, including reduced corruption.”
Zimbabwe	“Greater capacity in civil society and independent media to perform their democratic and scrutinising functions.”
Kenya	“Greater respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, including reduced corruption.”
Zambia	“Improved capacity and increased democratic space to be able to work for and strengthen human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.”
Tanzania	“Greater respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, with a particular focus on marginalised groups and defenders and advocates of democracy. Stronger conditions for demanding accountability, greater transparency and reduced corruption.”

At the same time, civil society’s ability and opportunity to carry out its work differ strongly between the countries in the table in terms of history and context, shifting democratic space, traditions in civil society, fragility and levels of conflict, economic conditions, etc.

A focus on capacity

What then does capacity as referred to in Swedish policy documents mean in the field of development cooperation? Capacity has been defined by the OECD DAC as *“the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully...”* DAC sees capacity development as “The process by which individuals, groups and organisations, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their systems, resources and knowledge; all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives.” Capacity development could be viewed as relating to three different types of capacity human resources, organisational capacity, and institutional factors in the enabling or hindering context. Organisational capacity specifically can be dependent on underlying capacity dimensions such as strategy, system, structures, equipment, knowledge and skills, and work environment, but also, for example, networks or external institutional factors which directly affect the operations or movement in focus.

These definitions illustrate that capacity is a result of a process, as the organisations supported are to use this capacity for other overarching purposes. The value of the capacity is judged in relation to what this increased capacity achieves or contributes with in terms of, in this case, the promotion of human rights and democracy (e.g. greater demanding of accountability, lobbying, mobilisation, knowledge boosting, etc.) Capacity should also be sustainable over time and, in an aid context, anchored in some form of strategy for long-term financial sustainability in the supported organisation.

One shortcoming of these arguments is that it is uncertain how rooted they are in specific civil society contexts. Critics have emphasised that capacity building through training and with a focus on new knowledge or skills often only minimally contributes to actual change unless sufficient notice is taken of underlying practices, structures and logics in the context that set boundaries for what happens in the area where the skills are to be used and where the support seeks to exert an influence.

A significant part of Swedish aid

In its annual report (2020), Sida states that it gives direct aid to approximately 400 civil society organisations around the world. These organisations are allocated about 40% of Sida’s total disbursements (ibid p. 29). In 2021 Sida is also working with and channelling aid through 16 Swedish “strategic partner organisations” (SPOs).¹ This specific channel constitutes approximately a fifth of Sweden’s total bilateral assistance via civil society. A large proportion of this is directed towards organisations working for democracy and human rights in various ways. Disbursements in recent years are shown in Table 2.

¹ ForumCiv, Union to Union, Olof Palme International Center, Swedish Mission Council, Afrikagrupperna, Diakonia, We Effect, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Save the Children, Plan International Sweden, RFSU, WWF, IM (Individuell Människohjälp), Kvinna till Kvinna, Civil Rights Defenders.

Table 2: Swedish aid disbursements, SEK million – Strategic partner organisations, civil society in total, total Swedish aid

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Strategic partner (SPO)	1640	1670	1770	1795	1837	1820
Civil society in total	7020	7170	8150	9220	9790	10130
Total Swedish aid	29023	34651	36768	42741	44451	46734
SPOs as % of total aid	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%
SPOs as % of CSO aid	23%	23%	22%	19%	19%	18%
Civil society as % of total aid	24%	21%	22%	22%	22%	22%

Source: CSO database and Openaid.se. Total Swedish aid refers to costs in expenditure area 7 of the Budget Bill. Current prices.

Sida divides civil society organisations into three main categories:

- 1) Partner country organisations (local organisations in partner countries)
- 2) Donor country organisations (Swedish organisations and national organisations in other donor countries)
- 3) International organisations.

Most of the assistance goes to the support and strengthening organisations in partner countries.

Table 2 shows that the volume of Swedish aid through strategic partner organisations (SPOs, previously “framework organisations”) and via civil society in total have increased somewhat over time. Total civil society aid has increased more than aid to SPOs in recent years and CSO aid has not increased as a proportion of total aid. The relative importance of SPOs in CSO aid thus appears to have decreased somewhat over time.

The 15 individual countries that received the most assistance via civil society in 2020, according to Openaid.se, were Syria, Afghanistan, DRC, Somalia, Palestine, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mali, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and South Sudan. With some important exceptions, there is thus a strong focus on Sub-Saharan Africa.

A relatively large proportion of civil society aid in the area of democracy thus goes to Eastern and Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. A review of strategy reporting for Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe shows that the capacity development contributions through civil society are funded by (at least) between SEK 50 and 100 million per year in these four countries. Another example is Mozambique, where Sweden, together with the UK, is the biggest civil society donor (2010–2016).

The Swedish strategic partner organisations (SPOs) funded contributions and operations in a total of 84 countries in 2020 (not including regionally coded aid).² 67% of this is coded as aid for democracy and human rights in the CSO database. The ten largest African recipients of aid for democracy and human rights via Swedish SPOs in 2020 were Ethiopia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, DRC, Zambia, Mali and Kenya.

Purpose and questions

The purpose of the evaluation is to investigate to what extent and how Sweden's official development assistance over time contributes to the objective of sustainably strengthening civil society's capacity to work for democracy and human rights in Africa. The study should stimulate learning and use by establishing what has influenced success or failure and how Sweden can work more effectively to strengthen capacity in civil society.

The following four questions should be addressed:

1. To what extent has Swedish aid made a clear and long-term difference in relation to Sweden's objective to strengthen the capacity of civil society to promote human rights and democracy in Africa?
2. To what extent has increased capacity been translated into impact on democracy or human rights, for example through greater accountability, political mobilisation, scrutiny of power, influence on local, regional or national decision-makers?
3. Which factors, circumstances or mechanisms explain the degree of goal fulfilment and success or failure (questions 1 and 2) and how can differences in goal fulfilment be understood or explained?
4. How can and should efforts to strengthen civil society's capacity be developed or improved in the countries and sectors studied to work for democracy and human rights more effectively and sustainably?

Question 1 and 2 are the study's fundamental and result-oriented summative questions. Both expected and unexpected results should be studied. The difference between question 1 and 2 is related to the time perspective and the size of the results. The focus on capacity can both be linked to specific formulations in the respective country strategy and to the authors' own interpretation of the concept of capacity, which the evaluators are expected to define before operationalisation. Question 3 is explanatory and should form a basis for learning and for the causal

² The five biggest recipient countries in both 2019 and 2020 were the West Bank/ Gaza, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and India but a large proportion of contributions are coded as regional and global aid.

analysis (for questions 1 and 2). Question 4 is formative, learning-oriented and future-focused.³

The authors may marginally rework or modify the questions during the initial phase of the evaluation. The team is also given great freedom to propose and argue for their preferred evaluation design.

Conduct of the study

The team of authors is asked to formulate a study proposal based on the four overarching questions. A detailed description of the study's approach, design and method is to be presented in the tender. It is up to those submitting proposals to choose the evaluation design and method themselves. The work is to be of high scientific quality and clear justification must be provided for the design and method choices in the proposal.

The evaluation is to include two to four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where Sweden has had a large proportion of CSO aid. The countries chosen may either differ clearly regarding conditions for civil society to operate and regarding the situation in view of human rights and the development of democracy *or* form a basis for comparisons across countries. Potential countries to study are Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, DRC, Burkina Faso, Uganda, South Sudan and Zambia. The study is to examine interventions (broadly) classified by Sida as democracy and human rights, which were funded for at least 5 years and where capacity building was one aim or partial aim. The time period in focus is 2009–2021. The results of the contributions must not be known in advance and the added value of the Swedish assistance must be analysed in the light of the total funding of the organisation or intervention in question.

Delimitations, country focus and potential case studies are suggested by those submitting proposals based on an initial, simple portfolio analysis conducted as an initial step after signing the contract (the data for the portfolio analysis will be provided by the EBA). However, those submitting proposals must clearly and exhaustively describe principles and an intended *process* for selecting countries and case studies in the proposal itself. The fact that the portfolio is very large makes it particularly important to have a well thought-through and precise selection strategy.

Two to four case studies are to be conducted per country. One case study may very well correspond to several projects or grants to one and the same organisation or intervention over time.

Questions about causality and the impact of contributions relative to other factors and alternative explanations must be analysed carefully when answering questions 1–3.

³ Regarding OECD DAC's evaluation criteria, Effectiveness and Impact (questions 1, 2 and 3) are the focus of the evaluation and not Relevance, Coherence, Sustainability and Efficiency.

Scientific methodology must be used to ensure reliable conclusions and a high degree of transparency. Examples of evaluation design that can be considered are case-study based approaches, system-based approaches, theory-based approaches, such as Contribution Analysis (Mayne, 2012), Process tracing (Beach & Pedersen, 2013), Outcome Harvesting (Wilson- Grau, 2018), Diagnostic approach (Befani 2021) or various combinations (the design must be well-justified).

In their proposal, the investigators must also show how they will analyse the questions and contributions in relation to research-based knowledge on capacity-building and civil society organisations work in low and middle-income countries with a focus on Africa.

The evaluation is to have a learning purpose. In this regard it is particularly important to understand how underlying factors or mechanisms have affected the result and how and why good or less good results have arisen.

Target group and intended users of the study

The main target groups of the study are the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and civil society organisations in Sweden and the countries affected. The target groups will be invited to the study's reference group to safeguard opportunities for process learning.⁴ Before the report is completed, the authors (with the support of the EBA) are expected to arrange a workshop in Stockholm with key target groups in which preliminary results will be discussed (the embassies involved will be given the opportunity to participate via video link).

The EBA works under what is termed "double independence". This means that the EBA defines which questions and areas are to be studied, independently of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. At the same time, analysis, conclusions and recommendations in each study are the responsibility of the author.

Work on the study will be monitored by a reference group headed by one of the EBA's members. The reference group will meet two to four times during the period of the study to discuss the design and focus of the study, its quality, conclusions and recommendations.

The study is to be reported in the form of a report in English (with an exhaustive Swedish summary) of a maximum 70 pages plus annexes and which in addition to an ordinary launch is to be used as the basis of learning seminars with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and civil society. The report is to be able to be published in EBA's main series of reports.

⁴ See: Process Use of Evaluations: Types of Use that Precede Lessons Learned and Feedback, Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, Evaluation, 2002.

Procurement process, budget and timetable

The procedure will be a restricted procedure in two stages.⁵

First stage: Application to submit tenders

All suppliers have the right to apply to submit tenders (expression of interest). EBA will invite three (3) suppliers to submit tenders.

Applications to submit tenders shall be registered at the tender portal Kommers Annons eLite (www.kommersannons.se/elite). The application shall contain:

1. CV of the team leader/principal investigator
2. A list of the team leader/principal investigator's most relevant publications (at most 10 studies from the last 10 years are to be listed)
3. Preliminary team (if more than one author. Described using at most 300 words.)
4. At most three sample studies conducted by members of the proposed team. At least one shall have been authored by the team leader/principal investigator.
5. A short account for how, according to the authors, respective study has contributed to new, reliable, knowledge (at most 300 words, i.e. 100 words per study).

Applicants are kindly asked not to submit any unsolicited material.

Selection of applicants to invite to submit tenders will be based on the submitted material assessed against sub-criteria 1-3 of criterion 2 (see the table at the end of this document). Since the proposed team is preliminary, main weight will be put on the team leader/principal investigator's experience and competence.

Suppliers must submit a self-declaration in the form of a European Single Procurement Document (ESPD) by filling in the tender form at www.kommersannons.se/elite. Please make sure enough time is allocated for completing the ESPD form when submitting the expression of interest.

Second stage: Submission of complete tender/project proposal

Three qualified investigators/research teams will be invited to submit a complete evaluation proposal. A detailed description of the approach, method and design of the study must then be presented (see above). It is up to the tenderers themselves to choose the design and method of the evaluation and to suggest case study countries and case studies. The choice of case studies does not need to be determined when the tender is submitted but a clear description of the principles and starting points of the selection process must be provided. The work is to be of high scientific quality, and clear justification must be provided for the method and design choices in the proposal.

⁵ The Public Procurement Act (2016:1145), chapter 6, section 3.

The project proposal is to be written in English and must not exceed 12 pages. In addition to that set out in the previous paragraph, the proposal must contain a presentation of the members of the evaluation team, a clear time-scale, allocation of time and tasks between the team's members and the budget (stated in SEK, including price per hour for each team member). The following must be provided as annexes to the proposal: (i) CVs; (ii) At most three studies or evaluations carried out by members of the proposed team. At least one of these must be written by the principal investigator. This annex may be the same or different from the application to submit tenders; (iii) A brief account for how, according to the authors, respective study has contributed to new, reliable, knowledge (at most 300 words, i.e. 100 words per study, may be the same or different from the application to submit tenders).

The maximum cost of the evaluation is SEK 2,000,000 (ex VAT). The budget shall enable two to four meetings with the study's reference group (to be appointed by the EBA following dialogue with the authors), a workshop in Stockholm and participation at the launch event. It is intended that these activities will be held in Stockholm, but one or two meetings may be conducted by video link.

In the second stage, tenderers shall give an account of all potential conflicts of interest pertaining to members in the evaluation team, as this may be grounds for excluding tenders.

An assessment group comprising members of the Expert Group and the secretariat will assess proposals received based on the relationship between price and quality. The allocation criteria consist of (i) the design of the proposal, (ii) the qualifications of the authors, and (iii) cost in line with the weightings as set out in the Annex.

Questions to the EBA during the procurement process

During the procurement process, the EBA is not permitted to discuss documentation, tenders, evaluation or any such questions with tenderers in a way that benefits one or more tenderers.

Any questions before the first stage may be submitted up to and including 8 August via the questions function of the procurement portal Kommers Annons eLite, www.kommersannons.se/elite. Questions will not be answered between 10 July and 1 August. Any questions before the second stage may be submitted up to and including 10 September. Questions and answers will be published anonymously and simultaneously to everyone registered for this procurement.

Preliminary timetable

Last day to apply to submit tenders (first stage)	15 August 2021
Invitation to three suppliers to submit complete tenders	23 August 2021
Last day to submit tender (second stage)	22 September
Decision by the EBA	6 October 2021
Contract signed between the EBA and the team of authors	October 2021

Workshop on preliminary results for key target groups	August 2022
Draft final report submitted	23 October 2022
Planned launch	January 2023

Applications/tenders are to be submitted via www.kommersannonns.se/elite in both the first and the second stage.

Tenders submitted must remain valid until 31 December 2021.

After the EBA's selected supplier has been announced, all submitted proposals will become official documents, meaning that the Swedish principle of public access to official records applies. Sentences, sections or paragraphs in a document may be redacted in the public version if "good reasons" (thorough motivations in terms of causing economic damage to the company) can be provided and deemed valid. The tenderers are fully responsible for making their claims of confidentiality.

About the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee mandated to evaluate and analyse the direction, governance, and implementation of Sweden's official development assistance with a specific focus on results and efficiency. The aim is to contribute to an efficient implementation of well-designed aid. EBA focuses primarily on overarching issues within Swedish development assistance, not on individual projects. EBA consists of an expert group of ten members, and a secretariat placed in Stockholm.

In 2021 the Expert Group consists of: Helena Lindholm (chair), Johan Schaar (vice chair), Kim Forss, Torgny Holmgren, Sara Johansson De Silva, Staffan I. Lindberg, Magnus Lindell, Joakim Molander, Julia Schalk, Janet Vähämäki and Anders Trojenborg (adjunct expert from the Swedish MFA).

Annex – evaluation criteria for tenders received

Criteria	1. Quality of proposal, in terms of design, methods and plan for implementation (weight: 60 per cent)*	2. Experiences and qualifications of team members in areas of relevance to the study (weight: 25 per cent)	3. Cost (weight: 15 per cent)
Scale	<p>Criteria 1 and 2 are graded 0 to 5 where: 5 = Exemplary; 4 = Excellent; 3 = Good; 2 = Adequate; 1 = Poor; 0 = not possible to assess. Sub-criteria are given descending importance as numbered but are not graded numerically.</p> <p>Each criterion is finally weighted (0.60*Criterion 1 + 0.25*Criterion 2 + 0.15*Criterion 3) to obtain a final grade in the range [0, 5].</p>		<p>Continuous grading (0, 5] as proportion of lowest cost, where lowest cost receives a grade of 5.</p>
Sub-criteria <i>(numbered according to descending importance in the evaluation)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the design of the study, its proposed operationalisation, methods and plan for implementation make it possible to fulfil the purpose of the study by exhaustively answering all four questions? 2. Have the evaluation design and method been described specifically and transparently in relation to all the four respective questions? 3. Have the authors clearly set out how they have methodologically intended to tackle causality/causal connections and how the selection of countries and case studies is to be made? 4. Have important or relevant methodological limitations been described clearly and discussed? 5. Will the study design and implementation make it possible to draw reliable conclusions that can be expected to form the basis of use, learning and reflection among the study's target groups? 6. Have the authors clearly set out how they will incorporate the questions and interventions in a wider research-based context. <p>* An overarching assessment of implementability without breaches of ethics occurring is to be carried out but is not included as a separate sub-criterion</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Team members' knowledge and experience in evaluation and/or research regarding: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Civil society organisations in low and middle-income countries (especially Africa) b) Research-based evaluation methods and methodology c) Democracy and human rights in low and middle-income countries (especially Africa) d) Capacity development and international development cooperation 2. Academic level of team members. 3. Quality of studies submitted. 4. Engagement of team members in line with the specification in the work and time plan and as part of the proposed budget. <p>* Sufficient language skills in relation to the need of the project must be shown and are therefore not stated as a separate sub-criterion.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total cost in Swedish kronor (ex. VAT).