



THE EBA AID REVIEW 2022

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Annual report from the Expert Group for Aid Studies for the year 2021

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Lake Atitlán, Guatemala. Photo: Mathijs Beks, Unsplash.

PREFACE

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee tasked with independently evaluating and analysing Sweden's international development assistance. This annual report is based on the studies published by EBA over the past year. It is available in hard copy, digitally and (in Swedish) as an audiobook.

THE SECOND YEAR of the corona pandemic, 2021, has further confirmed conclusions that became clear during the first: apart from the direct losses of human life, the effects of the pandemic can be measured in a sharp rise in the numbers living in poverty, children missing out on schooling, reduced equality, poorer health and poorer living conditions for a great many people around the world. This poses huge challenges for international aid.

Many governments moreover, using the pandemic as a pretext, have further narrowed the space available for civil society organisations, the media, opinion formers and democracy in general. Swedish aid goes to actors in many of the countries concerned.

The fundamental objective of Swedish development assistance – to create opportunities for people living in poverty and under oppression to improve their living conditions – has thus become more relevant than ever during the past year.

The pandemic itself calls for new approaches in the implementation of international aid. Social distancing makes it harder to work together in development processes. But the direction of aid also needs to be continuously reassessed, in the light of both the effects of the pandemic and the shrinking democratic space resulting from more authoritarian government.

EBA's main task is to provide an evidence base for the Swedish Government's management and development of aid, but our activities are also of

relevance and interest to other development actors. During the year, EBA has done a lot of work on evaluation as an instrument in the management of development assistance. How reliable are aid evaluations? What methods could be used to improve their quality? These are important questions at a juncture where aid constantly needs to evolve to meet new challenges in the world around us. Our hope is that EBA's contributions will be of use to a great many different actors involved in shaping the direction, design, and implementation of Swedish development assistance.

Stockholm, 31 March 2022

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LOOKING BACK

In the second year of the pandemic, extreme poverty has increased at an astonishing rate. Aid efforts to combat it need to be redoubled, says Expert Group Chair Helena Lindholm.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE 2021 FROM AN AID POINT OF VIEW?

– 2021, like the year before, has borne the stamp of the pandemic and its consequences. There's been a partial realignment of aid, towards tackling the health effects of the pandemic and alleviating its impacts in terms of increased poverty and inequality. Meanwhile, long-term development initiatives, in areas such as democracy, human rights, climate adaptation and peacebuilding, have continued, along with humanitarian interventions.

HAS THE PANDEMIC LED TO GREATER POVERTY AND INEQUALITY?

– Unfortunately it has. In the last two years, extreme poverty in the world has increased for the first time in twenty years. The earlier trend has been reversed. According to a UN report, the number of people living in extreme poverty rose by 120 million in 2020. That's an astonishing figure. Differences in income are also growing. That means that aid efforts to combat extreme poverty need to be redoubled.

”Ultimately, it boils down to the reliability of evaluations.”

DID THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC DIFFER FROM THE FIRST IN ANY WAY?

– The first year was more a time of shock and crisis, while 2021 was a year of adjustment. 2021

has of course also been marked by discussions about vaccination. For the aid sector, the unequal and inequitable global distribution of vaccines is an important issue. We've also seen some countries pursuing “vaccine diplomacy”, i.e. using vaccines to promote foreign policy objectives.

MANY OF THE THINGS SWEDISH AID SEEKS TO INFLUENCE SAW SETBACKS IN 2021 – POVERTY, CLIMATE, DEMOCRACY. HAS AID BECOME MORE DIFFICULT?

– Aid operates in complex environments, in which multiple challenges increasingly interact. Poverty, for example, interacts with weak institutions, a lack of democracy, conflict and climate change. That makes aid itself more complex. A case in point is Afghanistan, where the Taliban takeover has made it necessary for Sweden to redirect its assistance. Support for reconstruction through multilateral organisations is continuing and humanitarian relief is increasing, in a situation where aid to the Afghan state is not considered possible. Support for civil society organisations is also continuing. This illustrates the difficulties aid faces in complex and conflict-affected settings, where conditions can change dramatically.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON 2021 AS REGARDS FINDING COMMON SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS?

What the pandemic demonstrates is the necessity of multilateral cooperation. This may sound like a cliché, but tackling both the pandemic and problems like climate change, poverty and conflict requires us to work together. At the same time, growing nationalist and authoritarian tendencies in the world pose a challenge to multilateral cooperation, with countries like China and Russia tending to go their own way.

”In the last two years, extreme poverty in the world has increased for the first time in twenty years.”

Photo: Anna Hult

DEVELOPMENT SETBACKS AND OBSTACLES TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION – DO THEY AFFECT THE BASIS FOR EVALUATING AID?

Yes, in two ways. On the one hand, they perhaps make it even more vital to evaluate and analyse aid, so that we really learn how it can best be channelled in difficult circumstances. At the same time, they make it harder to measure impacts, which may take decades to emerge. What is extremely important, not least in a complex environment, is understanding the local context and what it actually entails. More attention needs to be paid to the knowledge and expertise existing in partner countries, partner organisations and local settings.

IN THIS YEAR'S EBA AID REVIEW, YOU WRITE ABOUT METHODS OF EVALUATION – WHY?

Evaluation methods are an important area for EBA. We want to know what methods can be said to work best in addressing different issues. Ultimately, it boils down to the reliability of evaluations. Are the findings they report reliable? Only if the methods used to carry them out are robust and fit for the purpose in hand can we know that for sure.

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY SURPRISES IN EBA'S WORK THIS YEAR?

I perhaps wouldn't say I've been surprised exactly, but something that did prove of great value was a study on how one of the OECD/DAC criteria, namely “relevance”, is used in aid evaluations. The report concludes that almost everything is judged to be “relevant”, forcing us to consider how useful the criterion really is. EBA also made a study of country evaluations, identifying possible ways of actually learning from them.

2022 IS ELECTION YEAR IN SWEDEN. WILL THAT AFFECT EBA?

Not really. EBA has its remit and its terms of reference, which are not appreciably affected by the fact that this is an election year. At the same time, development assistance is of course a political issue, and both the design of aid and our remit are ultimately determined by the Government and the Riksdag – so it remains to be seen.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

An ever growing proportion of the world's poor live in fragile states, where armed conflict is or has been a part of everyday life. Implementing development interventions there demands a great deal in terms of analysis and cooperation between actors with different mandates. Several studies show that there is much to be learnt.

OVER TIME, there has been a growing focus in Swedish development assistance on fragile and conflict-affected countries – where the state is weak and there is a danger of armed groups taking over the whole or part of the country. A current example is Afghanistan, which before the Taliban takeover was Sweden's biggest partner country. Several EBA studies identify challenges and areas for improvement in Swedish aid to these countries. Key challenges include the governance of aid, context analysis and coordination with other actors. Another difficulty is achieving and maintaining results in situations where Sweden and other donors at the same time wish to distance themselves from illegitimate regimes.

One study (*EBA 2021:08*) highlights differences in the way Sweden has applied internationally agreed principles on operating in fragile and conflict-affected states. Where developing country partners had a stronger will and capacity for peacebuilding, Sweden's efforts proved more effective. The most important of the areas studied were understanding the conflicts in depth, coordination with other actors and donors, and promoting partner countries' own systems and national ownership and inclusion. Close interaction between the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, and political engagement, were particularly important in these contexts.

One weakness overall, however, was the limited resources available for initiatives that could not be classed as official development assistance. Interaction between long-term development cooperation, peacebuilding operations and humanitarian aid was also weak. Such interaction is often described in terms of a “nexus” approach, which seeks to adapt, monitor, and assess interventions according to the conditions and needs of the specific situation. However, this approach has proved difficult to apply in practice. The report therefore calls for better coordination and knowledge sharing between international and Swedish actors. Establishing a special category of staff for work in fragile states would also help to achieve this.

“Activities need to be guided by a more joined-up approach.”

AN EBA WORKING PAPER (*August 2021*) on Sweden's development cooperation with Afghanistan concludes that, by and large, results have been poor. Sweden's strategies have been ambitious,

but understanding of the context has been limited and analysis has been weakly linked to what is actually achievable in Afghan society. Donor coordination has also been inadequate. The author believes, though, that Swedish aid has been more effective when based on more locally embedded, long-term, and flexible ways of working. A key challenge for Swedish development assistance in fragile environments is being able to work in this way, at the same time as there is pressure to focus on interventions capable of absorbing large sums, which also increases the risk of corruption.

MANY OF THE CONCLUSIONS presented in EBA's Afghanistan report had long been known to those responsible, yet little seems to have been done to change or refocus the country programme. The

case of Afghanistan shows that Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) need to become much better at adapting their operations on the basis of experience gained.

An evaluation of the FBA (*EBA 2021:07*) concludes that it is in many ways an effective organisation, achieving positive results in its areas of operation. At the same time, it seems to be guided by partly unrealistic objectives. Effectiveness is chiefly determined by political factors in partner countries, at the same time as the tools used by the FBA, as a Swedish authority, are technical and administrative (training courses and secondment of personnel). Such instruments can only achieve the ambitious objectives to a limited extent or indirectly.



Migrants on the border between Poland and Belarus.
Photo: Maxim Guchek, BELTA, AFP, Belarus OUT, TT News Agency.

“Donor coordination has been inadequate.”



Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo: Mohammed Husaini, Unsplash.

One conclusion from the evaluation is that the FBA’s work is to a certain extent fragmented, involving limited and often small financial investments in difficult environments. Its activities need to be guided by a more joined-up approach. Initiatives should be implemented on a larger scale, in collaboration with other Swedish and foreign agencies, and with clearly identified national counterparts. Using the FBA’s own research findings as a basis for its operations has also proved a major challenge.

IN SPRING 2021 EBA arranged roundtable discussions with a range of experts on the theme of “forced displacement and the humanitarian–development nexus”. The discussions, presented in a working paper (*June 2021*), pointed for example to a need for interventions covering the

entire population of a given geographical area, rather than just displaced groups. This is necessary to avoid tensions with the host community. Responses must also take account of conditions at the regional and national as well as the local level, at the same time as problems and needs are local. There is thus no avoiding an in-depth context analysis and efforts to secure local support. Other practical challenges are reconciling the approaches of different organisations and sectors, and the potential tensions between different programming and funding cycles, methodologies and philosophies.

One outcome of the roundtable conversations to date is an EBA study mapping displaced people’s access to different countries’ systems of social protection.

CONCLUSIONS

- A key challenge for Swedish aid in fragile and conflict-affected environments is the need for flexible, long-term efforts to ensure that interventions are locally embedded and coordinated with other actors, at the same time as there is pressure to focus on interventions capable of rapidly absorbing large amounts of aid funding.
- Existing systems for continuous learning and adaptation of projects and programmes are insufficient in fragile and conflict-affected environments. In such situations there is a greater risk of inadequate understanding of the context, and hence of poor results or unexpected negative effects.
- Interaction between long-term development cooperation and other necessary actors and interventions has generally been unsatisfactory in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

REPORTS:

A. Burlin (ed.) (2021), *Forced Displacement and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: A Roundtable Anthology*, **EBA Working Paper, June 2021**

A. Pain (2021), *Punching Above its Weight or Running with the Crowd? Lessons from Sweden’s Development Cooperation with Afghanistan, 2002–2020*, **EBA Working Paper, August 2021**

G. Milante et al. (2022), *Practicing Peace-building Principles – A Study of Sweden’s Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*, **EBA 2021:08**

N. Svensson et al. (2022), *In Pursuit of Sustainable Peace – An Evaluation of the Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2008-2019*, **EBA 2021:07**



Sonargaon, the old capital of Bangladesh.
Photo: Allauddin Miajee, Unsplash.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT CORRUPTION IN AID

Corruption is a serious problem that threatens the implementation and results of development assistance, as well as obstructing development processes more generally. EBA has previously published several studies in this area, and continued this work in 2021 with a literature review of the subject.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CORRUPTION for development are a recurring question in the international aid debate. Among the issues discussed are how corruption inhibits development and poverty reduction generally, and to what extent development funds go missing as a result of corruption and irregularities.

“Corruption is a global problem, not confined to poor countries.”

In the debate about how much aid money is lost to corruption, various sums, proportions or percentages are often mentioned, but with no clear evidence to back them up. To establish what is known about the scale of the problem, EBA published a literature review during the year (*July 2021*). One of its conclusions is that different studies and reports present very different results. Neither the overall global extent nor the cost of corruption can be reliably calculated. Figures on its prevalence in the aid sector vary widely. This is probably due to differing definitions or measures of corruption and varying data collection methods and contexts. There is simply not enough reliable research for us to draw

conclusions about how much aid is lost owing to corruption or other irregularities.

Several research studies and other publications do, however, suggest that the risk of corruption is especially high in humanitarian aid and development cooperation in fragile and conflict-affected states. There seems to be more corruption in countries and societies where needs, poverty and vulnerability are greater. A large influx of funds and the particular vulnerability of recipients in humanitarian crises may also heighten the risks of corruption, for example in the form of incorrect payments or abuse of power using sexual acts as currency – known as “sextortion” (*EBA 2020:06*).

LIKE EARLIER STUDIES, though, EBA’s review of the research literature clearly shows that corrupt practices adversely affect the results of aid. Corruption is a global problem, not confined to poor countries. International discussions and efforts to combat it thus need to take place everywhere and at every level.

Aid can both increase and reduce corruption in a partner country. EBA has previously published several studies shedding light on this and providing important understanding of how corruption can be fought. Bo Rothstein and Marcus Tannenbergh (*EBA 2015:07*) stress the importance of functioning public institutions in curbing corruption, to enable aid to have any effect at all. They conclude that, if the purpose of Swedish development assistance is to improve “human



Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo: Sohaib Ghyasi, Unsplash.

well-being”, then a greater share of it should be used to promote better governance of society and strengthen public administrative capacity.

EBA’s literature review notes that very limited research has been done on the different ways in which bilateral and multilateral aid can curb corruption. However, EBA has earlier published other studies in this area, besides Rothstein and Tannenberg’s. One was *Seven Steps to Evidence-Based Anti-Corruption: A Roadmap* (EBA 2017:10), which described ways of supporting institutions and establishing effective anti-corruption efforts. Like Rothstein and Tannenberg, its author, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, concludes that very few earlier aid initiatives to reduce corruption have had any impact. To bring about change, donors need to agree a common strategy with local civil societies, and the latter must work together to develop and support long-term national strategies laying a foundation for ethical universalism and integrity in public administration. Another previous report found that budget support can strengthen national institutions that

monitor corruption (EBA 2018:04). However, this is a form of aid that has disappeared in recent years, partly in fact because the risks of corruption were considered too high.

The importance of functioning governance of society is clearly reflected in the situation in Afghanistan over the past year. In EBA’s working paper on Swedish aid to that country over the last 20 years (August 2021), it is noted that corruption has been fuelled by its weak public institutions. This has happened despite a strong focus among international donors on building a functioning Afghan state. It is unrealistic, though, to expect vulnerable environments like that of Afghanistan to be completely free from corruption. EBA has previously published a report on risk management in development assistance, which questions Sida’s zero-tolerance approach to corruption in fragile states on the grounds that it could undermine the credibility and effectiveness of Swedish aid (EBA 2019:02).

CONCLUSIONS

- There are no generalisable conclusions about the extent of corruption. It does, though, seem to be more widespread where there is greater vulnerability and poverty, and the risks appear to be especially high in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- Aid interventions to combat corruption have had limited effects, and studies stress the importance of donor cooperation and support for national agents for change in tackling corruption in the long term.
- To reduce corruption, there needs to be functioning governance of society, which in turn presupposes extensive institutional change that will build trust in the country’s public administration.

REPORTS:

H. Hede Skagerlind (2021), *Corruption and Aid: A Literature Review* (in Swedish), **EBA Working Paper, July 2021**

A. Pain (2021), *Punching Above its Weight or Running with the Crowd? Lessons from Sweden’s Development Cooperation with Afghanistan, 2002–2020*, **EBA Working Paper, August 2021**

G. Dijkstra (2018), *Budget Support, Poverty and Corruption: A Review of the Evidence*, **EBA 2018:04**

A. Mungiu-Pippidi (2017), *Seven Steps to Evidence-Based Anti-corruption: A Roadmap*, **EBA 2017:10**

B. Rothstein, M. Tannenberg (2015), *Making Development Work: The Quality of Government Approach*, **EBA 2015:07**

Å. Eldén, D. Calvo, E. Bjarnegård, S. Lundgren, S. Jonsson (2020), *Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence*, **EBA 2020:06**

N. Gulrajani, L. Mills (2020), *Fit for Fragility? An Exploration of Risk Stakeholders and Systems Inside Sida*, **EBA 2019:02**

NORMS AND VALUES IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Discriminatory and gender-stereotypical norms are major obstacles to development. A good understanding of what norms exist in different contexts is an important aspect of aid.

NORMS ARE UNWRITTEN RULES that affect our behaviour by telling us what is expected and desirable. They help us to act in a way that is in line with society's values. But social and cultural norms can also contribute to oppression and discrimination, a point highlighted in Swedish development cooperation, chiefly in relation to gender equality. The Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance makes it clear that “discriminatory and stereotypical gender norms, such as labour markets divided by gender, unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, and discriminatory practices regarding women's access to productive resources, constitute major obstacles to development”.

In development cooperation on issues such as gender equality and human rights, it is necessary to take local norms and values into account. But this is also a significant challenge, as there needs to be understanding and respect for the unequal balance of power that exists between different development actors.

THE EBA REPORT *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Measuring Values and Norms to Guide Swedish Development Cooperation* (EBA 2021:04) seeks to improve understanding of the norms and values supporting or undermining sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Its authors describe how social norms and values surrounding SRHR – like the right to decide about one's own body and fertility – are crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for gender equality and good health and

well-being set out in the 2030 Agenda. SRHR are based in international human rights conventions. These rights are being addressed by many local stakeholders. Donors are therefore often able to support work already in progress, rather than having to come in from the outside to advocate new agendas for norm change.

“Social and cultural norms can also contribute to oppression and discrimination.”

To get a better picture of what social norms and values look like, the report's authors analysed data from major national surveys conducted via the World Values Survey in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. One finding was that discriminatory norms are more common in relation to sexual and reproductive rights than in relation to sexual and reproductive health. Discriminatory norms and values are particularly common when it comes to the rights of LGBTIQ people, but also regarding issues such as abortion, women's decision-making, divorce, and young people's sexuality and right to choose a partner. However, no clear links were found between sociodemographic factors (age, level of education etc.) and the norms and values studied. Norms are multifaceted, and the associations observed, moreover, are not such that people are



Members of the Muvubuka Agunjuse youth club talk about family planning and contraception with a group of mechanics in a suburb of Kampala, Uganda. Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik, Getty Images, Images of Empowerment.

“more” or “less” supportive of SRHR as a whole. An individual or group may support rights in one area, but not another.

The report also maps Swedish SRHR aid to Africa between 2010 and 2018 and analyses how Sida's work relates to norms and values. In an example from Zimbabwe, it is noted that norms and values are viewed as important by both Sida and partner organisations, even if they are not expressly mentioned in cooperation strategies. A conclusion drawn in the report is that, to advance SRHR, it is crucial to measure and address norms and values, and to ground any discussions or interventions in relevant human rights frameworks.

“The view that menstruation is a sign that girls are ready for marriage makes them more vulnerable.”



Home visit by health care personnel offering advice on family planning and contraception.
Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik, Getty Images, Images of Empowerment.

REPORTS:

A. Kågesten, K. Båge, J. Sundewall, H. Litorp B. Puranen, O. Uthman, A.M. Ekström (2021), *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Measuring Values and Norms to Guide Swedish Development Cooperation*, **EBA 2021:04**

E. Bergenlöv, *Mapping of Swedish Aid Addressing Menstruation*, **EBA Working Paper, May 2021**

M. Dooley, A. Fried, R. Letkov, K. Doyle, J. Klugman, G. Barker (2019), *Applying a Masculinities Lens to the Gendered Impacts of Social Safety Nets*, **EBA 2019:07**

R. Marcus, D. Mathur, A. Shepherd (2019), *Impact of Civil Society Anti-Discrimination Initiatives: a Rapid Review*, **EBA 2019:05**

IN MORE CONCRETE TERMS, norms may influence how girls and women are affected by their menstruation. Stigma, a lack of sanitary products, and the view that menstruation is a sign that girls are ready for marriage, expose them for a number of risks. A working paper from EBA (*May 2021*) has examined Swedish aid addressing menstruation. Reporting is limited and could give the impression that there are fewer projects relating to menstruation than there actually are. Such projects may involve supplying sanitary products, and menstruation is also a priority in water and sanitation interventions. There are fewer initiatives, on the other hand, touching on social norms and policies.

Earlier EBA studies have shown that the commonest anti-discrimination initiatives are those seeking to change attitudes, norms and behaviour, but that the best effects on groups'

own capacity to claim their rights are secured if multiple actions are combined (*EBA 2019:05*). Rather than addressing and countering discriminatory norms, however, programmes frequently reinforce existing gender roles and norms (*EBA 2019:07*).

CONCLUSIONS

- Discriminatory norms are common, especially in relation to LGBTQI rights and abortion issues.
- To advance SRHR, it is crucial to understand, measure and address norms and values.
- Work on norms and values forms a central part of development cooperation, even if it is not expressly mentioned in cooperation strategies.

NOT EASY TO SUPPORT FREE AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Support for electoral processes is an important part of Swedish democracy assistance. As democracy declines in various parts of the world and election processes are undermined, the principles of electoral assistance need to be renewed and understanding of how elections are best conducted upgraded.

DEMOCRATIC GAINS are increasingly being lost as an authoritarian wave sweeps the world. According to the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg, by 2021 the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen had fallen back to where it was at the end of the cold war in 1990. In response to this decline, in 2019 the Swedish Government launched its "Drive for Democracy", covering the whole of the country's foreign and development policy. One aim of the drive is to resist and combat growing authoritarian tendencies, and it includes support for democratic electoral processes as a priority area.

Supporting free and fair elections, universal suffrage and political parties has long been an important element of Swedish international development cooperation. But what do we know about how support for electoral processes works? In recent years, clear democratic backsliding has been seen in several countries that have been provided with electoral assistance. That is true not only of the most notorious cases in 2021, Afghanistan and Myanmar. In countries like Libya, Cambodia, Yemen and Haiti, too, democratic progress has been short-lived. These trends prompt questions such as: What are the key obstacles to electoral assistance producing successful and sustainable results? What forms of and approaches to such assistance have a greater chance of achieving democratic objectives?

In search of answers, EBA commissioned a report on support for electoral processes, titled *Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Electoral Assistance* (*EBA 2021:05*).

Written by a team of authors from International IDEA, it pulls together the knowledge acquired by experts and practitioners in this field. The report concludes that electoral assistance can still have an important part to play, but also spells out the limits to what it is able to achieve. It cannot, for example, heal deep societal rifts, change the status of women in society, or establish democracy where it is absent. But it can, if thoughtfully designed and implemented, create support structures for all actors genuinely committed to fair and credible electoral processes.

Given current challenges and attempts to undermine elections in various ways, however, knowledge sharing about electoral processes needs to be stepped up. The report recommends that Sweden should initiate international forums for this. How is continued support to be provided for democratisation and democratic government to be maintained over time? Regional and global knowledge-sharing platforms are said to have particular potential to uphold the norms of free and fair elections. The report's authors also argue that, given the growing resistance to such elections in many places, the modalities of electoral assistance need to be revisited.

REPORTS:

T. Pearce Laanela, S. Alihodzic, A. Spinelli, P. Wolf, *Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Election Assistance*, **EBA 2021:05**

CAN WE RELY ON AID EVALUATIONS?

Knowledge about the results of development assistance is important for both accountability and learning. But what can be said about the quality of aid evaluations? And how reliable are their conclusions regarding the effectiveness, relevance and long-term impact of interventions?

SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE is intended to help reduce poverty and oppression. It can only be carried out effectively and bring about the intended change if we know what does and does not work. That in turn requires regular monitoring and evaluation. Evaluations of aid usually proceed from one or more of the evaluation criteria agreed by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) – relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, efficiency and coherence. EBA has produced several publications looking at how these criteria are applied.

“Effective aid is only possible if we know what does and does not work.”

One report (*EBA 2021:02*) explores what evaluations say about the effectiveness of Sida's aid interventions and how reliable the conclusions are. Its author reviews 80 decentralised and six strategic evaluations commissioned by Sida,

and arrives at two overall findings: evaluations usually conclude that interventions have largely achieved their objectives, but these conclusions on effectiveness cannot always be regarded as reliable. This is because of the way the evaluations are designed. They often focus on the short-term benefits (outputs) and more immediate effects (outcomes) of projects, while more rarely including a satisfactory assessment of the more long-term effects and unforeseen consequences (impacts). According to the author, this creates an incomplete picture of the interventions' goal attainment.

The report argues that the inability of aid evaluations to deliver reliable conclusions about the impact of interventions is due largely to inadequacies in the questions asked and the methods employed. Evaluators rarely use advanced methods to assess impact, nor do they generally analyse the mechanisms or factors that explain how projects achieve results. The author therefore recommends using methods that can both clarify causal relationships and strengthen analyses of the long-term effects and unforeseen consequences of interventions.

ANOTHER REPORT published by EBA (*March 2021*) examines how the OECD/DAC criterion of

relevance – that is, how well development projects correspond to beneficiaries' needs and priorities – is used in aid evaluations. The author's conclusion is that evaluations nearly always judge interventions to be relevant. He therefore problematises both the way the relevance concept is used and the simplified assessments that are often arrived at. One difficulty in evaluating project relevance is that it is unclear who is to answer the question: are the views of the donor, the partner country, or the target group to take precedence? The author recommends only using the relevance criterion when it is suited to the purpose of the evaluation. And when it is used, the evaluation's terms of reference should make it clear whose perspective is to take priority. Representatives of partner countries and target groups should be involved in the assessment. In addition, it should be based on a graduated scale, rather than a simple yes-or-no question.

EBA has recently also published a working paper (*January 2022*) assessing the quality and use of its own country evaluations, based on the OECD/DAC criteria. To date, EBA has carried out country

“It needs to be clarified what is meant by relevance.”

evaluations of aid to Tanzania, Uganda, Cambodia (two studies), and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors conclude that these evaluations provided valuable findings and knowledge that could promote learning, especially regarding the long-term impacts of aid in terms of poverty reduction. But they also find that they paid limited attention to partner countries' priorities, coordination with other donors, and shared learning for target groups in partner countries and in Sweden. In addition, like the report on effectiveness, the working paper points out that the country evaluations had certain methodological weaknesses and were more descriptive than explanatory.



Image from drought-stricken Saaba in Burkina Faso, where fishing canoes have been left, waiting for the water to return. Photo: Yoda Adaman, Unsplash.



Man in Cambodia transporting part of his crop.
Photo: Paul Szweczyk, Unsplash.

DOES COMMUNICATION INCREASE THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AID?

How is development assistance communicated? To what extent have Sida's communication efforts affected Swedes' knowledge of the subject?

EBA has evaluated whether information projects have increased the knowledge about development cooperation among the Swedish public.

FOR MOST OF THE HISTORY of Swedish development cooperation, specific support has been given to information and communication efforts, with the aim of strengthening public knowledge about aid and about conditions in low- and middle-income countries. These efforts are guided by the *Strategy for Information and Communication Operations, including through Organisations within Civil Society* (the "InfoCom Strategy"). EBA has evaluated activities in this field over the period 2010–20 (*EBA 2021:06*). To describe both the basic conditions for and effectiveness of these activities, the study has examined media coverage of aid, changes in Swedes' views on and knowledge of the subject, and the possible knowledge effects of specific interventions.

The evaluation builds on an earlier EBA study (*EBA 2019:01*) of how development assistance has adapted to the growing influence of the media. According to that study, media coverage of aid largely consists of reporting that is neutral in tone. The focus is on conflicts, disasters, and results, with less coverage devoted to long-term development cooperation. The conclusion drawn was that the media have strongly influenced the political management of aid. Examples of this include a growing focus in development assistance on transparency, on reporting results and on managing reputational crises – trends which the authors also see reflected in the design of the InfoCom Strategy.

The recent evaluation of information and communication efforts confirms that the media picture is dominated by acute events in the world around us, making it harder to build knowledge via news media. But while the period 2010–20 is characterised by a declining interest and engagement in development issues, levels of both self-assessed and actual knowledge about development cooperation among the general public are rising. Although

it is difficult to link this rise to the information activities undertaken, the evaluation shows that the intervention studied – ranging from digital initiatives to talks in schools, leadership training and study visits – report high levels of effectiveness. This suggests that they have had a positive effect, at least in terms of increased awareness of aid among target audiences.

The authors of the report conclude that the current InfoCom Strategy has helped to enhance public knowledge of development issues. Reasons for this include the in-depth analyses of who should be reached and how best to reach them, the use of multiple channels and providers, and the deployment of a wide range of initiatives. Sida and civil society organisations have also had considerable scope to design activities according to the context. The strategy has mirrored the broader societal trend to make greater use of digital channels. As advancement of knowledge presupposes dialogue, it is important to use such channels in combination with other activities that encourage participation and reflection. Given the difficulties involved in measuring the strategy's effectiveness, there is also a need for qualitative evaluations of individual initiatives. These would enable results to be monitored and learning among those implementing communication projects.

CONCLUSIONS

- Evaluations of aid usually conclude that interventions achieve their objectives and are relevant. But the reliability of their conclusions, specifically regarding the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of interventions, is often unsatisfactory.
- It needs to be clarified, on a case-by-case basis, what is meant by relevance. This could result in more informative and nuanced assessments of that criterion.
- Cooperation with stakeholders in partner countries can be important in evaluations and in assessing the relevance of interventions.

REPORTS:

M. Burman (2021), *Goals and Mechanisms: What Do Evaluations Say about the Effectiveness of Swedish Aid Interventions?* (in Swedish), **EBA 2021:02**

J. Samoff (2021), *Relevant? Almost Always – Relevance in Development Cooperation*, **EBA Working Paper, March 2021**

E. Stern and O. Winckler Andersen (2022), *Assessment of the EBA's Country Evaluations: Quality, Use & Learning*, **EBA Working Paper, January 2022**

REPORTS:

M. Grafström and C. Strand (2022), *Informed or Knowledgeable? Evaluation of Aid Information and Communication Projects, 2010–2020* (in Swedish, with a summary in English), **EBA 2021:06**

M. Grafström and K. Windell (2019), *Scandals, Opinions and Reputation: Development Assistance in a Mediatized Society* (in Swedish, with a summary in English), **EBA 2019:01**

BETTER METHODS OF EVALUATING AID

An almost ever-present issue in development assistance is how best to capture the results of interventions. But while the capacity to reliably assess results has probably never been better than it is now, little use is actually made of the knowledge available.

FOR MANY YEARS there were discussions about whether quantitative or qualitative methods were the best way of assessing the impacts of aid. That debate has since faded. The consensus view now is that a mix of qualitative and quantitative elements should often be used in evaluations, based on the idea that the choice of method should be guided by the question to be assessed. This has also been the starting point for EBA's evaluations and contributions to the methodology debate.

"A mix of qualitative and quantitative elements can often be used"

Two methods studies presented in 2021 shed light on this. The report *EBA 2021:03* is concerned with what are called theory-based evaluations, that is, evaluations that seek to explain how and by what mechanisms results arise. By establishing what theories exist about an intervention achieving results, and then testing the different steps of the theory to finally assess whether those results have in fact been obtained, such an evaluation provides a basis both for learning and for decisions for the future.

The point is that theory-based methods not only measure results, but can also explain how and why they are achieved, for whom, and to what extent. Furthermore, they can highlight inherent limitations and identify unexpected side effects.

Many different types of theory-based evaluation exist. The one dealt with in this EBA report is known as "Bayesian theory-based evaluation", as it is inspired by the thinking of mathematician Thomas Bayes. One benefit of this particular method is that it combines advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Like the former, it can explain results and work on single case studies. Like the latter, it can be considered "rigorous", in the sense that its operations are traceable and reproducible, which usually makes for greater reliability. The credibility of the findings arrived at by this method is enhanced by the fact that conclusions are associated with explicit "levels of confidence", as in statistical analysis.

In this connection, mention should be made of the report *EBA 2017:09*, which used geographically coded data to analyse the effects of development projects. Geocoding precisely indicates the location, in terms of latitude and longitude, in which an intervention has taken place. The evaluation approach described makes use of such geocoded information about development projects and results at the local level, to evaluate how aid has been distributed and what effects it has produced. Rapid expansion in the availability of geocoded data enables development data – that is,

”Swedish development actors could do more to make use of the new evaluation methods available.”

information on specific aid projects, including their geographical location – to be combined with information on development results from other data sources. Combining geocoded data with information from individual- or household-level surveys, for example, allows us to evaluate the distribution and local effects of development projects. This can be done systematically and on a large scale, potentially across multiple recipient countries.

Another way of working is demonstrated in *EBA 2021:01*, which examines the potential of using computers and natural language processing to analyse large quantities of text in an automated way – an approach usually referred to as “machine learning”. The question asked is whether such tools and methods can provide reliable syntheses and analyses of information and conclusions from earlier evaluations. The EBA report reviews the strengths and weaknesses of these methods and argues that (1) descriptive statistics can be collected rapidly and effectively using machine learning; (2) the accuracy of the statistics thus generated is comparable to that of a manual assessment; (3) challenges arise in more complex interpretations of results, such as whether projects were judged to be sustainable or not; and (4) these more complex types of interpretation also varied in human-based assessments. The authors conclude that the usefulness of machine-learning methods depends on available resources, requirements in terms of transparency and replicability, and the need for a scaled-up analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

- A good deal more can be said about the results of development assistance. Swedish development actors could do more to make use of the new evaluation methods available.
- Knowledge about new qualitative and quantitative methods of impact evaluation is available at universities both in partner countries and in our own part of the world. Initiatives to test and experiment with these methods are therefore called for.
- Machine learning is of use in monitoring and evaluation, especially where a simpler description of large quantities of data is required.

REPORTS:

B. Befani (2021), *Credible Explanations of Development Outcomes: Improving Quality and Rigour with Bayesian Theory-Based Evaluation*, **EBA 2021:03**

G. Engström and J. Norén (2021), *Data Science Methods in Development Evaluation: Exploring the Potential*, **EBA 2021:01**

A-S. Isaksson (2017), *Geospatial Analysis of Aid: A New Approach to Aid Evaluation*, **EBA 2017:09**

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Developing a circular economy is highlighted as key to a sustainable society, both in Sweden and internationally. EBA has commissioned a study of what this could mean for developing countries and Swedish aid.

SINCE 2020 Sweden has had a national strategy for a circular economy, and in 2021 the Government adopted a national action plan. In the aid sector, the idea of a circular economy and closely related concepts have for some time now figured in a number of policy documents. The Budget Bill for 2021 states that development cooperation is to “support a transition to fossil-free economic development, built on a resource-efficient, circular and bio-based economy with non-toxic flows”. A circular economy is also assuming growing significance in international development cooperation and is a priority of the EU’s new development strategy for 2021–27.

What effects a greater focus on a circular economy could have in developing countries is less well known, however, and its potential significance for Swedish development assistance has not been studied. EBA therefore commissioned a working paper (*May 2021*) examining the concept and its importance for aid and development. The paper also presented an overall portfolio analysis of Sida’s programmes and projects in this area.

The authors note that central elements of a circular economy, such as resource efficiency, recycling and sustainable consumption and production, are far from new. Rather than highlighting entirely new issues, what the circular economy agenda does is link the growing climate and environmental crisis to innovation, employment, and economic growth.

Swedish development assistance supports many initiatives that are highly relevant to a more circular economy and a green transition in a broad sense. Sweden is also an important funder of several international organisations

and networks relevant to the global circular and green economy discussion. But despite a strong national and international agenda, there is no specific strategy for a circular economy within Swedish aid.

Transitioning to a circular economy requires a broad transformation of production and consumption in society, and a range of problems need to be addressed. If the transition is incomplete, there is for example a risk of trade in secondary materials and products between countries. Where environmental standards and technological capacity are inadequate, there is a danger that recycling will involve higher environmental and social costs. Another potential risk is that new product standards for durability, recyclability or traceability could become de facto trade barriers for low-income countries with limited capacity to adapt. Challenges such as these recall those earlier described by EBA in studies of the business sector’s involvement in aid (*EBA 2015:8*). The transition therefore needs to be achieved in close collaboration with partner countries and to involve common generation of knowledge and coordinated rule systems and policies.

REPORTS:

D. Slunge, I. Andersson, P. Wikström, T. Sterner (2021), *Circular Economy – a Conceptual Review and Analysis of Implications for Swedish Development Cooperation*, **EBA Working Paper, May 2021**

R. Klocker Larsen, S. Adler (2015), *Business and Human Rights in Development Cooperation – Has Sweden Incorporated the UN Guiding Principles*, **EBA 2015:08**

LOOKING AHEAD

Swedish development assistance would benefit from greater clarity about how policy proposals and priorities will help achieve the overarching objective of aid.

SWEDISH AID has the overall objective of creating opportunities for people living in poverty and under oppression to improve their living conditions. With that as the foundation, the direction of development assistance is set in terms of eight thematic areas. Priorities between and within these areas are then to be determined for each individual country, region, or organisation. In addition, aid shall be aligned with the 169 “integrated and indivisible” targets associated with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. All this creates scope for a broadly based – or alternatively, a fragmented – programme of aid.

Since 2019, Sweden has reported data on which SDGs achievement each bilateral intervention is intended to contribute directly to. One intervention may be relevant to several goals. The largest share of interventions, over 30 per cent, relate to gender equality (Goal 5) and peace (Goal 16). Less than 20 per cent of Swedish bilateral aid is directly designed to help end poverty (Goal 1), a smaller proportion than is intended to contribute to Goal 17, which is mainly to do with implementation issues. There is nothing strange, as such, about aid having other aims than directly reducing poverty. A multidimensional understanding of poverty, including elements such as education, health, and human security, is certainly justified. But such an understanding also complicates the route from overall policy direction to intervention outcome, making aid harder to grasp.

There is more discussion today than for a long time about the volume of Swedish development assistance, the “1 per cent target”. International

aid is always partly political and can take other policy priorities, foreign and domestic, into account. Such considerations are not always automatically consistent with the overall objective of aid. There appears to be broad political support for assistance in areas such as climate, global goods, humanitarian aid and other emergency relief. One assessment therefore is that these areas could remain a priority, whether the 1 per cent target is retained or abandoned. Other areas, however, would risk being pushed down the list of priorities, whether it be efforts to improve living conditions for vulnerable groups in the face of oppression or shrinking democratic space, or support for education and health in relatively stable low-income countries.

“The development policy conversation would benefit from greater clarity”

The wide array of goals and instruments in a complex and increasingly politicised area does not necessarily call for simpler aid, but rather for a conversation that carefully explains the capacity of aid to make a difference. There needs to be clarity about how proposed development policy priorities are expected to make Swedish aid more effective. EBA hopes to be able to contribute to that conversation.

A mobile clinic from Marie Stopes International, an organisation specialising in sexual and reproductive health, visits Laniar in Senegal. Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik, Getty Images, Images of Empowerment.

REPORTS AND SEMINARS IN 2021

STUDIES IN PROGRESS AS OF 31 DEC 2021

WORKING TITLE AND DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE GROUP*	AUTHORS
Evaluation of Sweden's Long-Term Development Cooperation with Ethiopia <i>Swedish development cooperation with Ethiopia has a very long history. The aims of the evaluation are:</i> 1. To gain an in-depth understanding of the relevance and long-term effects of this cooperation. 2. To generate lessons to inform future Swedish development cooperation, with both Ethiopia and other countries.	Fantu Cheru Annika Jayawardena Anders Ekbohm Tekeste Negash Arne Bigsten Stina Karlton Anette Wilhelmsen <i>Chair:</i> Kim Forss	Bereket Kebede Gunnar Köhlin Hailu Elias Leif Danielsson
The Role of Development Cooperation in the Development of Social Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa <i>Social protection is an important part of anti-poverty policies and strategies in low- and middle-income countries, and research has contributed to the adoption and expansion of these policies. However, the types of social protection programmes adopted and the pace at which they have expanded vary substantially across countries and regions.</i>	Ulrika Lång Jimi Adesina Marion Ouma Stephen Devereux Paul Quarles Van Ufford <i>Chair:</i> Joakim Molander	Miguel Niño-Zarazúa Ana Horigoshi Alma Santillán Hernández Ernesto Tiburcio
Mapping Swedish Aid to Agriculture <i>Support for agricultural development used to make up a large part of Swedish development cooperation. In recent decades, its share of the total has decreased substantially. Or has it? Is support for the agricultural sector continuing, but under new labels such as adaptation to climate change, market development, gender equality and others?</i>	Esse Nilsson Inge Gerremo Leslie Lipper Agnes Andersson-Djurfeldt Mohammad Sepahvand <i>Chair:</i> Torgny Holmgren	Ivar Virgin Ylva Ran Alice Castensson Filippa Ek
Implementation of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy <i>To deepen understanding of how this policy is contributing to and influencing gender equality efforts in countries where Sweden is engaged in development cooperation, a study is being conducted to systematically explore what new ways of working, tools and results feminist foreign policy has given rise to in the area of gender equality.</i>	Lena Karlsson Sofia Calltorp Robert Egnell Maria Eriksson Baaz Rikard Bengtsson <i>Chair:</i> Sara Johansson de Silva	Ann Towns Elin Bjarnegård Katarzyna Jezierska Kristen Kao
Sweden and the EU in the European Division of Labour: Lessons from Country Programming <i>The Lisbon Treaty emphasises that the EU and its member states should "complement and reinforce each other" in their development policies. The concept of "added value" is central to the EU institutions' country programming of development cooperation, in relation to the member states.</i>	Anki Fritzsche Torgny Svenungsson Sarah Delputte Fiona Ramsey Lars Niklasson <i>Chair:</i> Magnus Lindell	Erik Lundsgaarde
Evaluation of Swedish CSO Support to Sub-Saharan Africa <i>The purpose of this evaluation is to investigate to what extent and how Sweden's support is contributing to the aim of sustainably strengthening civil society's capacity to work for democracy and human rights in Africa.</i>	Reference group to be appointed. <i>Chair:</i> Staffan Lindberg	Ola Segnestam Larsson Malin Arvidson Jan Ström Pelle Åberg
Do Refugees Have Access to Social Protection Systems? <i>This study is mapping the extent to which forcibly displaced people have access to systems of social protection. Its aim is to help both donor and host country governments to formulate policies and programmes. The study is being undertaken jointly by EBA and the OECD.</i>	Andrew Mitchell Charles Obila Alexandre Kolev Liisa Malkki Kathrin Löber Karin Seyfert <i>Chair:</i> Helena Lindholm	Jason Gagnon Mona Ahmed Lisa Hjelm Jens Hesemann

* EBA reference groups are strictly consultative. Their members are not responsible for the content of reports and do not necessarily agree with the conclusions and recommendations set out there.

WORKING TITLE AND DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE GROUP*	AUTHORS
Evaluation of Strategic Secondments as a Tool to Promote Swedish Policy Priorities in Multilateral Organisations <i>EBA has started an evaluation of how the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida use secondments to promote Swedish development policy priorities within the UN system and the EU. It is intended to contribute to practical learning and highlight how secondments can be used as effectively as possible.</i>	Kamilla Lindström Margareta Wahlström Ola Andersson Daniel Naurin <i>Chair:</i> Sara Johansson de Silva	Lisa Dellmuth Paul Levin Nicklas Svensson
Adjustments to Sweden's Official Development Assistance Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic <i>The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on international development cooperation. Adjustments have been necessary in response to both its direct and its indirect effects. This study was initiated to provide an overview of what adjustments have been made and what can be learned from their implementation.</i>	Fredrik Ugglå Anders Nordström Johanna Wallmo Wahlgren Mo Hamza Nilima Guljarani <i>Chair:</i> Joakim Molander	Carsten Schwensen Jonas Lövkrona Louise Scheibel Smed
Theories of Change in Swedish Development Cooperation – An Anthology <i>EBA has decided to produce an anthology on theories of change in Swedish aid. The subject is particularly topical in that the Swedish Agency for Public Management and the National Financial Management Authority have recommended Sida to develop its use of theories of change at a strategic level, with a view to developing both management and opportunities for monitoring.</i>	<i>Editors:</i> Kim Forss, Jan Pettersson and Númi Östlund, EBA. <i>Reference persons at Sida:</i> Sara Haglund, Annika Sandell and Alexandra Silfverstolpe Tolstoy. Additional readers will be invited for each chapter. <i>Chair:</i> Kim Forss	The anthology will be written by a number of different authors, to ensure there is relevant expertise for the different chapters to be included.
Member State Influence in the Negotiations on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) <i>The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) represents a fundamental reform of EU development policy. Negotiations on this reform package were launched in June 2018 by a proposal from the European Commission. The NDICI was finally agreed by the European Parliament and the Council in March 2021, following almost three years of negotiations.</i>	Rebecca von Schreeb Fabio Wasserfallen Andrew Sherriff <i>Chair:</i> Torgny Holmgren	Jonas Tallberg Magnus Lundgren
The Role of Development Assistance in Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Low-Income Countries <i>Over the past two decades, significant progress has been made on SRHR. However, while the overall trend is positive, the average hides important differences across countries and regions. The purpose of this research project is to help improve understanding of the effectiveness of development assistance for health in the area of SRHR.</i>	Reference group to be appointed. <i>Chair:</i> Julia Schalk	Björn Ekman Jesper Sundewall
Acceptance of Green Economy Reforms <i>Swedish development cooperation is to support a transition to fossil-free economic development. But what do populations in partner countries think? Climate investments and environmental policy reforms are likely to fail if social acceptance for them is low.</i>	Reference group to be appointed. <i>Chair:</i> Johan Schaar	Daniel Slunge Niklas Halling Anna Nordén
Swedish Development Cooperation's Response to the HIV Epidemic – What Can We Learn? <i>The HIV epidemic has been one of the major health challenges of our time. From a development effectiveness perspective, the response to HIV is interesting because of the rapidly shifting landscape of knowledge and the learning process this has engendered. The purpose of this study is to assess and learn from Sweden's international response to the HIV epidemic, analysing what the response looked like and how it changed over time.</i>	Reference group to be appointed. <i>Chair:</i> Julia Schalk	Pam Baatsen Dennis van Wanrooij Coen Buvelot Hannah Kabelka Thyra de Jongh Gerwin Evers Josefine Olsson Liana Petrosova Noor Tromp

* EBA reference groups are strictly consultative. Their members are not responsible for the content of reports and do not necessarily agree with the conclusions and recommendations set out there.

EBA REPORTS 2021

The EBA decides independently what studies are to be undertaken. The authors of EBA reports bear sole responsibility for the analyses, conclusions and recommendations they contain. Final quality assurance is the responsibility of the Expert Group.

2021:08	Practicing Peacebuilding Principles: A Study of Sweden's Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States <i>Gary Milante, Jannie Lilja, Jups Kluyskens and Johanna Lindström</i>
2021:07	In Pursuit of Sustainable Peace: An Evaluation of the Folke Bernadotte Academy 2008–2019 <i>Nicklas Svensson, Julian Brett, Adam Moe Fejerskov and Charlotte Bonnet</i>
2021:06	Informed or Knowledgeable? Evaluation of Aid Information and Communication Projects, 2010–2020 (in Swedish, with a summary in English) <i>Maria Grafström and Cecilia Strand</i>
2021:05	Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Electoral Assistance <i>Therese Pearce Laanela, Sead Alihodžić, Antonio Spinelli and Peter Wolf</i>
2021:04	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Measuring Values and Norms to Guide Swedish Development Cooperation <i>Anna Kågesten, Karin Båge, Jesper Sundewall, Helena Litorp, Bi Puranen, Olalekan Uthman and Anna Mia Ekström</i>
2021:03	Credible Explanations of Development Outcomes: Improving Quality and Rigour with Bayesian Theory-Based Evaluation <i>Barbara Befani</i>
2021:02	Goals and Mechanisms: What Do Evaluations Say about the Effectiveness of Swedish Aid Interventions? (in Swedish) <i>Markus Burman</i>
2021:01	Data Science Methods in Development Evaluation: Exploring the Potential <i>Gustav Engström and Jonas Norén</i>

DEVELOPMENT DISSERTATION BRIEFS (DDBs) 2021

The EBA's DDB series gives newly graduated PhDs an opportunity to summarise their dissertations, with a focus on their relevance to Swedish development cooperation. The aim is to keep the Government, public authorities and other stakeholders updated on both new research and new researchers.

2021:03	Hierarchical Sisterhood – Supporting Women's Peacebuilding through Swedish Aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993–2013 <i>Sanela Bajramović</i>
2021:02	Liberation Conservation: The Salween Peace Park and the Politics of Possessing the Earth in Southeast Myanmar <i>Tomas Cole</i>
2021:01	The Invisibility Cloak – How 'Internationals' Emotions Affect Their Listening in Peacebuilding Partnerships <i>Pernilla Johansson</i>

WORKING PAPERS 2021

EBA working papers consist of brief syntheses of current knowledge, reviews and analyses. Interim reports from major projects are also published in this series, as are examined masters theses for which the EBA has acted as assistant supervisor. Working papers are not subject to quality assurance by the Expert Group.

Multi-Stakeholder Ownership and Sustainability in the Context of Development Projects, November 2021
Pranvera Muçaj

Theory of Change as a Strategic Sustainability Tool at IKEA (in Swedish), November 2021
Jens Andersson

Applying Adaptive Theory of Change in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings, November 2021
Léonie Borel, Julian Brett and Erik Bryld

Punching Above Its Weight or Running With the Crowd? Lessons From Sweden's Development Cooperation With Afghanistan, 2002–2020, August 2021
Adam Pain

Corruption and Aid: A Literature Review (in Swedish), July 2021
Helena Hede Skagerlind

Forced Displacement and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: A Roundtable Anthology, June 2021
Mona Ahmed, Alexander Burlin, Jason Gagnon, Karen Jacobsen, Sarah Miller and Kim Wilson

Relevant? Almost Always: Relevance in Development Cooperation, March 2021
Joel Samoff

Mapping of Swedish Aid Addressing Menstruation, May 2021
Elin Bergenlöv

Like-Minded in Principle or in Practice? Priorities and Allocations in EU Member States' Foreign Aid, May 2021
Olof Karlsson and Jonas Tallberg

Circular Economy – a Conceptual Review and Analysis of Implications for Swedish Development Cooperation, May 2021
Daniel Slunge, Ida Andersson, Petter Wikström and Thomas Sterner

THE EBA PODCAST 2021 (IN SWEDISH)

Episode 44 – Evaluating evaluations

Episode 43 – Norms here and there?
SRHR in aid

Episode 42 – Support for free and democratic elections

Episode 41 – Sweden's aid to Afghanistan

Episode 40 – What do we know about corruption in aid?

Episode 39 – A circular economy – between coffee and copper cables

Episode 38 – Democracy, bureaucracy, gender equality and climate – what have we learnt?

Episode 37 – The EBA Aid Review 2021 as an audiobook

Episode 36 – Gender budgeting in development assistance

Episode 35 – Democracy assistance – what are the impacts?

Episode 34 – Sex, corruption, and development cooperation

SEMINARS IN 2021

EBA seminars offer a natural forum for debate on important aid issues. Here, EBA reports are set in a broader context and discussed from both a policy and a practitioner point of view.

- 3 Dec **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Measuring Values and Norms to Guide Swedish Development Cooperation**
(EBA 2021:04)
- 26 Nov **Election Assistance in Times of Democratic Backlash**
(EBA 2021:05)
- 15 Oct **Credible Explanations of Development Outcomes with Bayesian Theory-Based Evaluation**
(EBA 2021:03)
- 15 Oct **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Swedish Aid** (in Swedish)
(EBA 2021:02)
- 31 Aug **Swedish Aid to Afghanistan – What Are the Lessons Learned?**
(Working paper, August 2021)
- 24 Jun **The History of Swedish Aid – 70 Years of Lessons** (in Swedish)
(*En svindlande uppgift: Sverige och biståndet 1945–1975*, Ordfront förlag, 2021)
- 3 Jun **Measuring the Effects of Development Assistance: Impacts on Democracy**
(EBA 2020:07)
- 2 Jun **Relevant? Almost Always: The Role of the Relevance Criterion in Development M&E**
(Working paper, March 2021)
- 28 May **Can Data Science Contribute to Better Evaluations of Development Cooperation?** (in Swedish)
(EBA 2021:01)
- 19 May **Research in Decision-Making – Use and Usefulness** (in Swedish)
(arranged jointly with the Swedish Development Research Network)
- 21 Apr **EBA at the Human Rights Days 2021: Sex, Corruption and Aid – How Do We Combat “Sextortion”?** (in Swedish)
(EBA 2020:06)
- 19 Apr **EBA at the Human Rights Days 2021: Discontinued Aid Projects – How Do They Affect the People Living There?** (in Swedish)
(DDB 2020:01)
- 25 Mar **Listening to Locals in Peacebuilding – Experiences from Bosnia, Myanmar and International Peacebuilding Partnerships**
(DDB 2021:01, 2021:02, 2021:03)
- 24 Feb **How Can Development Cooperation Support Climate Action?**
(Working paper, November 2020, and Sida’s report *Alignment of Swedish Bilateral Development Cooperation with the Paris Climate Agreement*)

THE EXPERT GROUP FOR AID STUDIES



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JULIA SCHALK
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The Expert Group for Aid Studies also includes an appointed expert from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Decisions taken by the Expert Group are carried out by a Secretariat with eight full-time equivalent employees: Anna Florell, Jan Pettersson (Managing Director), Helena Hede Skagerlind, Lisa Hjelm, Markus Burman, Mats Härsmar, Númi Östlund and Emma Hernborg.

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee tasked with independently evaluating and analysing Sweden's international development assistance.

Its remit is to contribute to an evidence base for the management of Swedish development cooperation.

The EBA Aid Review is based on the studies published by EBA over the past year. It is our annual report, and is available in digital and printed formats and (in Swedish) as an audiobook.

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**THE EXPERT GROUP
FOR AID STUDIES**