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EVIDENCE-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION? EVALUATION OF SIDA'S EFFORTS TO REDUCE CORRUPTION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES
AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Extended summary

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Extended report summary

to

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

This report is an extended summary of the evaluation of Sida's efforts to reduce corruption in partner countries. The full report presents a broader set of findings, conclusions and recommendations. In particular, the main report also provides a more elaborated treatment of the evaluation design and methodologies used.

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Introduction

Corruption is a significant barrier to development, undermining key aspects of society such as human rights, democracy, and economic growth. Recognizing the detrimental effects of corruption, global efforts to combat it have gained prominence, including the incorporation of anti-corruption goals in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16.5). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has a long-standing commitment to addressing corruption in partner countries and countering corruption as a risk to development funding. Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, Sida has taken up the mission of countering corruption as an obstacle to development with renewed vigor and the financial support to anti-corruption initiatives has increased. In 2016, Sida instructed all staff to take the new "development perspective" on corruption into account in their work and to integrate anti-corruption into all aspects of their operations.

This extended summary outlines and discusses the key findings of a report commissioned and funded by the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) on the potential of Sida's efforts to reduce corruption in partner countries.

Evaluation questions and components

Departing from the shift in the scope and character of Sida's anti-corruption work, this report evaluates Sida's approach and efforts to reduce corruption in partner countries. It does so by assessing the alignment of Sida's anti-corruption approach with current anti-corruption knowledge and the implementation of this approach on the ground by development cooperation staff. The evaluation answers two main questions:

- Is Sida's overall approach – policies, theories of change, structures, and organization – to reducing corruption in partner countries relevant in relation to the accumulated knowledge on how anti-corruption change occurs?

- Are Sida's on-the-ground efforts to reduce corruption in partner countries consistent with the tenets of Sida's policy and organizational approaches, and relevant to the contextual circumstances of partner countries?

The evaluation consists of three main components that contribute to answering the main questions:

1. A literature review summarizing the accumulated knowledge about how anti-corruption change occurs.

2. A comprehensive analysis of Sida's approach to tackling corruption as a development obstacle and its coherence with current knowledge of what works in anti-corruption.

3. In-depth analyses of Sida's anti-corruption work in partner countries – Kenya, Serbia, and Georgia. The analyses are based on case studies of the work and portfolios of interventions in the three countries and assessments of the relevance for and adjustment to the local context and coherence with Sida's overall approach.

The evaluation employs a mixed-methods approach to answer the evaluation questions. It draws upon a comprehensive review of academic scholarship on anti-corruption change, as well as an analysis of hundreds of documents sourced from Sida's head-quarters, development cooperation sections at embassies, and the Swedish government, primary for the period 2016 to 2022. The evaluation also includes an original online survey with program officers working at the development cooperation sections of Swedish embassies. In addition, the evaluation incorporates insights gathered from over a hundred interviews conducted in 2023 with relevant personnel at Sida's headquarters and in three partner

countries: Kenya, Serbia, and Georgia. These countries were selected in order to capture the divergent contexts in which Sida works, which allowed us to speak to the overall breadth of Sida's anti-corruption efforts as well as to their relevance to specific contexts.

State of the art on corruption and anti-corruption

Over the last few decades, corruption research has advanced significantly, leading to a deeper understanding of the root causes of corruption and the mechanisms that drive anti-corruption change. Initially, corruption was viewed as a form of individual misconduct that could be corrected through incentives, but this perspective has since evolved to recognize corruption as a collective action problem that necessitates changes in societal norms. The concept of "varieties of corruption" has also emerged, emphasizing the need for tailored anti-corruption approaches that are context-specific. The report discusses four main theoretical perspectives on corruption and anti-corruption change – the principal-agent theory (PAT), collective action problem (CAP) theory, developmental governance and the organizational approach.

PAT has been widely used in anti-corruption research and policymaking, with a strong focus on the nature of corruption, anti-corruption agents, and theories of change. Despite the dominance of PAT, the empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in reducing corruption is not definitive. The CAP theory has shifted the focus to the systemic nature of corruption, highlighting the importance of changing shared expectations to achieve sustainable anti-corruption outcomes. While CAP provides a theoretical framework for combating corruption, its actionability and practical implementation have been questioned, as it fails to provide clear guidance on how to effect desired changes. The limited practicality of the CAP framework has sparked interest in alternative approaches, such as developmental governance and organizational literatures, which

emphasize actionable anti-corruption strategies tailored to specific contexts. These approaches aim to strike a balance between generalizability and context-specificity, acknowledging the ever-changing nature of corruption dynamics.

Developmental governance focuses on inducing change through incentives, linking back to the PAT framework but highlighting the significance of context-specific characteristics in achieving successful outcomes. The organizational approach also asserts that each anti-corruption journey is unique, emphasizing the importance of context in devising effective reform strategies. While the organizational literature integrates aspects of both PAT and CAP, it places a heavy emphasis on case studies for substantiating its applicability, which may limit its scalability and practical adoption on a broader scale. There is a clear need for a balance between general principles and a nuanced understanding of context-specific challenges in anti-corruption efforts, presenting a significant challenge in the field of anti-corruption research and practice. Development cooperation professionals play a crucial role in navigating the complexities of corruption and devising tailored strategies that account for the diverse and evolving nature of corrupt practices.

In summarizing the state of knowledge in relation to each of the four theoretical perspectives, the report concludes that:

- PAT persists as a way of thinking about corruption, anti-corruption change, and practice. It also features the largest empirical evidence base, but continued high levels of corruption, despite its prescriptions, raise considerable doubts about its effectiveness.

- CAP is theoretically coherent but features a long causal chain of anti-corruption transformation with little guidance as to how to initiate and follow-up the anti-corruption reform. While there is a solid evidence base supporting links between certain elements of the causal chain, nothing of this sort exists with regard to the causal chain in its entirety.

- Developmental governance is a middle-range theory that strikes a balance between generalizability and context-specificity. It features a small, but quickly expanding body of empirical research. These studies offer valuable insights into the design of anti-corruption strategies, delineating what proves effective, what does not, and the underlying reasons behind these outcomes.

- The organizational approach privileges context to the maximum extent; it provides a sound methodology for formulating an appropriate reform strategy but renders each anti-corruption journey highly idiosyncratic.

Each of the theories of anti-corruption change reviewed in the report possesses its own strengths and weaknesses. This makes it challenging to identify a clear frontrunner that could offer development cooperation professionals a definitive framework for cohesive anti-corruption efforts. Three out of the four theories examined characterize corruption as a social practice and a systemic phenomenon. Yet, they differ significantly in their approaches to anti-corruption change. Conversely, organizational theory, while not disregarding the concept of corruption as a social practice, adopts a bottom-up perspective in defining corruption and in devising anti-corruption measures.

Sida's anti-corruption approach

The analysis of Sida's anti-corruption approach and policies and Swedish government strategies focuses on assessing whether Sida's approach is relevant to the accumulated knowledge and to what extent anti-corruption goals and targets are incorporated into development cooperation strategies. To accomplish these goals, the evaluation relied on two types of data. These included (1) Sida's steering documents relating to anti-corruption efforts and Swedish government strategies for international development cooperation,

and (2) key informant interviews with personnel at Sida's head-quarters, including continuous dialogue with key anti-corruption personnel, staff at the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, and representatives of other donor organizations.

Sida's conceptualization of corruption

The analysis of policy documentation reveals that Sida's anti-corruption approach is based on a characterization of corruption as:

- The abuse of trust, power, or position for improper gain.

- Predominantly a shared expectation, but the role of individual calculus is also acknowledged.

- A systemic phenomenon, wherein the system pertains to the national political community, but excludes the international and cross border domains.

In the contexts where Sida operates, Sida characterizes corruption as a systemic phenomenon and a social practice, driven by the expected behavior of "others" in society, which is rooted in the uneven distribution of power. Sida treats corruption as a matter of context, most often defined at the level of a country's political community, but also within sectors and other contexts.

With regard to theories of change, Sida's anti-corruption approach encompasses several narratives of anti-corruption change. These revolve around three major types of anti-corruption activities advocated by the approach: strategic direct interventions, strategic indirect interventions, and systematic integration of anti-corruption (Sida, 2021). Sida's current anti-corruption approach is centered on addressing corruption indirectly through context-specific preventive measures and systematically integrating anti-corruption into all facets of its operations.

Table 1 outlines the major differences between Sida's old and current approaches. The current approach stems from Sida's characterization of corruption as a predominantly social practice permeating society at all levels. This enables Sida to draw upon various theoretical frameworks of anti-corruption change and to expand the range of anti-corruption measures.

Table 1: Sida's anti-corruption approach: old and current

Old approach	Current approach
Focus on individual corrupt acts	Focus on corruption as a social practice and a systemic phenomenon
Reactive: detection and prosecution of corrupt acts	Proactive: prevention of corruption
One-size-fits-all	Context-specific
Direct approach: rule and enforcement	Measures that do not target corruption directly and systematic integration of anti-corruption

While the idea of addressing corruption indirectly draws heavily on the CAP literature, and the Quality of Government approach in particular, several facilitators necessary for generating and sustaining successful collective action are not adequately incorporated. Moreover, there is considerable ambiguity regarding the underlying causal mechanisms of certain suggested operational solutions, such as monitoring and sanctioning. This may hinder effective implementation of the policy by personnel on the ground. Moreover, the less established theoretical foundation of the systematic integration approach compromises the policy's potential to effectively reduce corruption in partner countries.

Anti-corruption in development cooperation strategies

This section addresses the question of the extent to which anti-corruption concerns are included in Swedish development cooperation at the policy level. Currently, Sida is guided by 45 strategies, which include 26 bilateral, seven regional, and 12 thematic strategies. In our analysis, we first examined whether each strategy explicitly referenced reducing corruption as either a goal or an activity. A greater frequency of the term reduced corruption across strategies, whether denoting a goal or an activity, indicated a more thorough consideration of the anti-corruption perspective. In the next step, we attempted to analyze the semantic context surrounding the term "corruption" to discern whether the core facets of Sida's anti-corruption approach – viewing corruption as a systemic phenomenon, considering context-specific factors, prioritizing prevention, and employing indirect measures and systematic integration of anti-corruption – have been incorporated into the strategies.

In summary, presently half of the government strategies have reduced corruption as a goal, pointing to something less than the full incorporation of an anti-corruption perspective into Swedish international development cooperation strategies. This is, however, a substantial increase compared to the 2010s, when only 10% of the strategies included such a goal. Furthermore, two-thirds of the strategies contain reduced corruption as a designated activity, suggesting that anti-corruption at the time of this analysis had become an integral part of Swedish international development cooperation. However, including reduced corruption into strategies as a goal is, arguably, more consequential for the success of Sida's anti-corruption efforts as it impacts the allocation of aid funds for anti-corruption initiatives. When it comes to what Sida's anti-corruption approach refers to as the systematic integration of anti-corruption, we do not

find evidence of a balanced representation of the focal measures – accountability, transparency, participation, efficiency, and integrity – throughout the strategies, as required by the policy.

Organizational structure of anti-corruption

Sida supports the implementation of anti-corruption policy through a robust anti-corruption infrastructure and a range of operational documents and tools that provide guidance for anti-corruption action. The policy's operationalization, however, trails behind other areas of Swedish international development cooperation that have been prioritized by the government as "perspectives", i.e. poverty, a rights-based perspective, gender equality, conflict, and environment and climate. In addition to being tied to a less developed toolkit to support implementation, the fact that anti-corruption is not an official perspective creates a hierarchical arrangement of objectives, potentially prompting employees to prioritize goals situated at the apex of this hierarchy.

Sida's work in partner countries is structured in such a manner that it enables partner organizations to take the lead in generating intervention ideas. This ensures that initiatives are firmly embedded in the local context and effectively address specific needs. Program officers also play a crucial role in shaping contributions, ensuring alignment with the objectives of the relevant Swedish government strategies, with the goals of partner country governments, and with the initiatives of other donors. However, these sets of objectives may not always perfectly align, underscoring the necessity for meaningful dialogue between program officers and local stakeholders to ensure that interventions are responsive to local needs and priorities.

Summarizing reflections on Sida's approach

Sida's anti-corruption approach can be summarized as (1) viewing corruption as a social practice that permeates all spheres of society and as a development obstacle, (2) which is best addressed through indirect, (3) context-specific, and (4) preventative measures, and by (5) systematically integrating anti-corruption into all of Sida's development efforts. This approach is relevant from the point of view of both the current knowledge base and the prevailing standard in the development cooperation industry (see the report's Appendix B.4 for a sample of opinions about Sida's anti-corruption approach by other donors and stakeholders). This points to a high potential to contribute to reduced corruption in partner countries.

Although Sida's anti-corruption approach is largely aligned with the accumulated knowledge, a degree of misalignment is detected in relation to the application of collective action theory and the insights from sectoral and organizational literatures. Additionally, there remains a degree of ambiguity regarding the precise pathways through which the advocated measures, particularly measures of systematic integration, engender anti-corruption transformation. This misalignment and ambiguity pose a risk to the policy's potential to contribute to the reduction of corruption in partner countries.

Having examined the 45 current government strategies, we found that half of them included the goal of reduced corruption, which according to the evaluative criteria set in the analytical framework signifies a moderate level of inclusion of anti-corruption at the policy level. There is, however, a substantial increase in the share of strategies that have reduced corruption as a goal compared to 2011, which points to a positive trajectory of integration.

Finally, we find that despite the policy's emphasis on the equal significance of the five areas of anti-corruption efforts underpinning systematic integration, the concepts reflecting these five areas do not appear consistently across all the strategies. Therefore, we evaluate the integration of this facet of the policy as low.

Sida's anti-corruption efforts in partner countries: survey data evidence

The evaluation included an original online survey with 149 program officers working at the development cooperation sections at 32 embassies administering Swedish development cooperation funds (aid embassies) and Sida's four regional offices. Survey data was used to examine how program officers comprehend the four building blocks of Sida's anti-corruption approach and translate them into action. Based on this data, the evaluation assessed the extent to which program officers adhere to and are able to implement Sida's anti-corruption approach and the challenges faced in embracing the development perspective and the systematic integration of anti-corruption efforts into policy areas.

The table below provides an overview of our assessment regarding the degree of adherence to the four building blocks of Sida's anti-corruption policy. Among the 15 facets of the anti-corruption approach, eight were evaluated as exhibiting high adherence, while five received a rating of low adherence, with the remaining two falling in the middle.

Within the first building block – awareness and knowledge – all facets except one were rated as exhibiting high adherence. However, the remaining facet, which concerns theories of change, was assessed as having low adherence, despite its critical importance. By contrast, utilization of different elements of the anti-corruption infrastructure was found at the lower end of the rating scale, ranging between moderate (helpdesks) and low (member of anti-corruption network and anti-corruption focal point). Finally, incorporation of anti-corruption interventions into contributions (blocks two and three) and coordination and dialogue (block four) received mixed ratings.

Table 2: Adherence to the anti-corruption approach

Finding	Degree of adherence
Awareness and knowledge	
Majority rank corruption as the top obstacle to development	High
Majority has good/very good understanding of corruption in the context	High
Majority improved their understanding of corruption over last two years	High
Majority has access to a corruption analysis	High
Majority agrees that corruption analysis aids them in identifying and better supporting anti-corruption contributions	High
Majority does not have a clear picture of theories of change underlying systematic integration	Low
Utilization of anti-corruption infrastructure	
Quarter are members of the anti-corruption network	Low
Quarter do not have an anti-corruption focal point or are uncertain who the focal point is	Low
Half never used anti-corruption help desks in the last two years	Moderate
Anti-corruption interventions in contributions	
Half has at least one contribution with strategic anti-corruption measures (direct or indirect)	Moderate
Majority has at least one contribution with systematic integration interventions	High
A third has more contributions with systematic integration measures than two years ago	Low
Dialogue	
Majority engages in internal dialogue	High
Dialogue with colleagues at Sida HQ on the development perspective is rare	Low
Majority engages partner organizations whose projects do not have apparent anti-corruption objectives in dialogue on integration of anti-corruption measures	High

Based on these individual assessments, we conclude that the overall adherence to the development perspective in the work of on-the-ground personnel is moderate.

Table 3 presents several additional findings from the descriptive statistics, of relevance for the assessment of adherence to the development perspective. A positive sign indicates an expected positive influence on implementation, while a negative sign suggests a negative influence. Out of five findings, two are expected to have a negative impact on adherence to, or implementation of, the policy: a quarter of program officers consider support from HQ to be insufficient, and a quarter feel that systematic integration is very difficult or difficult. These findings point to areas where additional measures may be appropriate to boost implementation of anti-corruption policy.

Table 3: Factors with potential to influence the implementation of the anti-corruption approach and policy

Finding	Direction of influence
Half believes itself to be sufficiently equipped to systematically integrate anti-corruption	+
Quarter feels that systematic integration is very difficult/difficult	–
Quarter considers support from HQ insufficient	–
Majority finds TRAC useful	+
Over time trend in the adoption of the policy's facets	+

Conversely, the remaining three findings are expected to have a positive impact on adherence: half of program officers believe that they are sufficiently equipped to systematically integrate anti-corruption into their individual portfolios; the majority of program officers find TRAC (Sida's contributions management system) to be useful, and the trend over time in the adoption of the policy's facets indicates improved adherence to the policy.

Finally, while program officers, on average, assessed the anti-corruption potential of the measures in their current portfolio of contributions as not very high, there is considerable variation in the responses.

Sida's anti-corruption effort on the ground

This section summarizes the findings of the evaluation of Sida's anti-corruption efforts in three country settings (Kenya, Serbia, and Georgia), reflective of the varied contexts in which Sida operates. The goals of the country case studies were:

- To gauge the extent to which program officers' implementation efforts are in line with the main tenets of Sida's anti-corruption approach, including the understanding of corruption, the ambition to support strategic direct and indirect interventions as well as systematic integration, utilization of the anti-corruption infrastructure, and engagement in coordination and dialogue.

- To assess the extent to which anti-corruption efforts by embassy personnel is coherent with the objective of the relevant Swedish government strategy and the developmental priorities of the partner countries.

- To assess the extent to which anti-corruption efforts are sensitive to the socio-economic and political conditions in which they take place.

The cases were deliberately chosen to encompass a range of societal conditions relevant to both corruption and to the activities of development cooperation actors.

The below sections present the main conclusions from the three case studies. In-depth analyses of the country contexts and of Sida's anti-corruption work in the respective countries can be found in the main report.

Main conclusions from the Kenya case study

When assessing the potential of Sida's current efforts to contribute to reducing corruption in Kenya, it is crucial to maintain a realistic and humble perspective. The pervasive nature of corruption within Kenya's political, economic, and social fabric, its deep historical roots, the relatively young age of democratic institutions (only 20 years old), and the modest scale of Sida's operations in Kenya all require careful consideration. Transitioning away from a status quo in which corruption is deeply entrenched in society is an immensely challenging and intricate process. Importantly, successful change is most likely to occur through endogenous and organic shifts. The role of external actors in these processes is likely to be limited.

In terms of policy adherence – and potential for implementation – an awareness of the four building blocks of the anti-corruption policy among program officers is low, and there is little indication that the change in Sida's anti-corruption approach has influenced how program officers work on-the-ground. There is also a paucity of explicit theories of change underpinning contributions. Internal dialogue among program officers is not an institutionalized routine and neither is the use of Sida's anti-corruption infrastructure. These issues, jointly, point to a rather low adherence to the anti-corruption policy.

The contributions considered in this evaluation collectively grappled with the pervasive issue of corruption in Kenya, primarily through strategic indirect interventions. In this sense, the actions taken in contributions are compliant with the anti-corruption approach. However, Sida's anti-corruption efforts in Kenya are dominated by the risk perspective.

The focus of anti-corruption interventions in Kenya's portfolio appears to be shifting from strategic direct to strategic indirect approaches. While this shift may appear to be a step in the right direction, as bolstering politically dependent enforcement institutions has not resulted in a reduction in corruption, several contextual

factors indicate that such a dramatic shift may not be necessary. First, there exists a robust anti-corruption legal framework embodied in the 2010 constitution, which constitutes a bedrock on which a less corrupt Kenya can emerge. This constitution, heavily influenced by civil society and representing a political settlement among elites, forged in response to internal crises, enjoys strong support for its rigorous implementation. Arguably, Sida's most significant contribution towards creating conditions conducive to controlling corruption lies in supporting Kenyan CSOs through core, rather than project-based, assistance. Second, there are "islands of integrity" within the government, which play pivotal roles as allies in combating corruption. Recognizing and supporting these entities is essential for effective anti-corruption efforts.

Strategic indirect contributions underpinned a number of inter-ventions, such as public financial management, transparency in public budgets, greater gender equality in the public sector among others, as recommended by the anti-corruption policy. However, there is a notable lack of understanding among program officers regarding underlying theories of change. Consequently, if anti-corruption change does occur, it is unclear whether it resulted from these indirect measures. The paucity of theories of change underpinning anti-corruption interventions renders the potential impact of these contributions unknowable.

In light of this, the potential impact of Sida's anti-corruption effort in Kenya is at best remedial in the short-term, but external funding to civil society and support to institutional allies keeps the window for change open.

Main conclusions from the Serbia case study

Personnel on the ground at the embassy in Serbia demonstrated a commendable familiarity with Sida's anti-corruption approach. They moreover actively engage in internal dialogue, communication with Sida's Anti-Corruption Cluster, and in the organization-wide anti-

corruption infrastructure. They also demonstrated an in-depth understanding of corruption that extended beyond the national context in general to specific sectors and organizations. Program officers were often engaged in deliberate efforts to select interventions suitable for the corruption problems identified, and they had ongoing dialogue with partners as well as other development cooperation actors. While project documentation may not consistently include well-defined theories of change, interviews with program officers indicated that theories of change are an integral part of their work with contributions. These considerations collectively point to a high adherence to the anti-corruption policy.

The conditions for change and reform in Serbia are currently unfavorable. Endemic corruption is an intractable problem, particularly in regimes that curtail contestation, freedoms of association and expression, the separation of powers and, indeed, the separation of the spheres of politics, the state, market, and civil society. Designing and deploying impactful anti-corruption interventions under such conditions presents a challenge. Arguably, the most rational strategy is to employ a very indirect approach by seeking to sustain or, if possible, strengthen the conditions that promote change when political openings arise and perhaps contribute, where possible, to changing the current political conditions. In this regard, Sida's anti-corruption strategy is sensitive to the socio-economic and political conditions of Serbia.

In past decades, Sida and the larger donor community employed a more direct approach through projects specifically setting up anti-corruption agencies, developing anti-corruption policies and legal frameworks, and utilizing the capacities for monitoring and sanctioning corruption in government operations. This approach yielded little result as knowledge transfer and capacity building related directly to anti-corruption could not change the fact that principals were either prevented from performing accountability work or incentivized to turn a blind eye. Members of Sida's staff feel that this approach corresponds to Sida's policies on corruption as a

development obstacle, but that they instinctively began approaching anti-corruption in a more indirect way in the early 2000s, since the direct approach was not working.

POs as well as many partner organizations now seek avenues of advancement wherever they may appear. These include stimulating demand for good government, including access to the judiciary, various open data projects (for which there is a pocket of political commitment), and strengthening the capacity of civil servants and forums for accountability.

Given the political climate, the prospects for significantly reducing corruption are, in the near to medium term, low. While the portfolio of projects approaches the issue from various perspectives and promotes conditions that may, in the longer term, help to bring about change, change in the short term requires political will. The will for reform has not been sustained even with the incentive of EU membership, which highlights the difficulty of the task at hand. That said, in closed political periods, maintaining the status quo may itself be a means to maintain the societal structures and conditions that can help promote positive change when the political climate shifts. Even if somewhat restricted given the rather limited access to mainstream media, the existence of organizations that seek to document misdeeds and support whistleblowers can act as a reservoir of policy expertise on anti-corruption. Furthermore, advocacy for much-needed institutional reform provides a forum to allow possible coalitions to form and to generate change when a window of opportunity presents itself.

Main conclusions from the Georgia case study

In terms of policy adherence and implementation, most program officers demonstrated limited awareness of the new anti-corruption approach, especially when it comes to systematic integration. The use of Sida's anti-corruption infrastructure was also limited, and

there was not an established routine for sharing and learning from the team's experiences. The understanding of the anti-corruption policy among staff in Georgia is dominated by the risk perspective. One noteworthy challenge in policy implementation is the reluctance among program officers to fully embrace the importance of theories of anti-corruption change when designing and supporting contributions.

Having said this, corruption and anti-corruption have been on the agenda of the development cooperation section at the embassy in Georgia for nearly two decades. Staff continuity has ensured that that there is a degree of institutional memory and accumulated knowledge. The section's understanding of corruption in the Georgian context is sound and its characterization of the current situation in the country aligns with that found in the academic literature and reputable media.

The contributions assessed in this report tackle corruption through a blend of strategic interventions. Transparency International Georgia and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information have carried the heaviest burden of anti-corruption efforts. The core support extended to these organizations enables them to implement strategic interventions of both a direct and indirect nature, adapting them as needed to the frequently shifting political terrain. Furthermore, in terms of efficiency, the core support provided to Transparency International Georgia and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information sustains a robust and wide-ranging anti-corruption portfolio of interventions to combat corruption, relative to the funds they receive.

In Georgia, "rule and enforcement" efforts are spearheaded by NGOs, which contrasts with the situation in Serbia, where such work has primarily been led by multilateral organizations. The prevalence of NGO-led strategic direct interventions is well-suited to the Georgian context, where corruption is primarily concentrated at the highest levels of authority and there is a strong civil society willing and capable of serving the watchdog role.

The repeated attempts by the ruling Georgian Dream party to hinder the willingness and capacity of civil society to hold powerholders accountable, evidenced by the attempts to introduce the so-called "Russian law", speaks volumes about the expertise of these organizations in combating corruption. This suggests a high potential for these organizations' interventions to address corruption.

Strategic indirect interventions are primarily concentrated on leveraging open data, enhancing public finance management, and implementing measures to address structural inequalities within society, particularly gender imbalances. During interviews, program officers had an opportunity to reflect on the theories of change underpinning such interventions, revealing a mixed understanding. While some program officers had a clear understanding of the causal mechanisms behind the interventions they oversaw, others struggled to even approximate them. As in Kenya, the lack of clarity regarding the theories of change underpinning these anti-corruption interventions renders their potential impact rather uncertain.

Given these considerations, Sida's anti-corruption efforts can be assessed in two key dimensions. First, providing core support to highly capable and dedicated organizations with a strong commitment to the anti-corruption cause holds significant potential. However, this is conditioned on maintaining favorable political conditions, such as a liberal democratic environment and strong ties to the EU accession process. Second, given the lack of explicit understanding of theories of change regarding strategic indirect interventions and the paucity of systematic integration measures, the potential of these efforts is rather low.

Conclusions from three case studies

This section outlines several key findings regarding the implementation of anti-corruption efforts across the different countries. The first thing to note is a disparity in the level of policy awareness among personnel. Program officers in Serbia exhibit a better understanding compared to those in Kenya and Georgia.

Furthermore, while utilization of the anti-corruption infrastructure by program officers in Kenya and Georgia was sub-optimal, program officers in Serbia have been very active members of the Sida-wide network of anti-corruption sharing and learning. This finding aligns with survey evidence indicating that the anti-corruption infrastructure is underutilized.

There is also scant evidence that an internal anti-corruption dialogue is institutionalized within the development cooperation sections in Kenya and Georgia. In contrast, such dialogue is a standard operating procedure in Serbia. This finding contrasts with the survey findings, which indicate that over 90% of program officers engage in such dialogue.

The policy requirement of a political economy analysis of corruption was not fully met in all countries, and in all three cases, the implementation efforts are primarily concentrated to the risk perspective.

Another common feature among the three cases is the program officers' sound understanding of corruption within the country contexts. This finding is consistent with the evidence from the survey data. The comprehension of local drivers and dynamics of corruption has facilitated many judicious decisions regarding the selection and support of anti-corruption contributions. Moreover, the anti-corruption efforts reviewed largely align with the objectives of relevant Swedish government strategies and the developmental priorities of the partner countries' governments.

The country portfolios of contributions with anti-corruption relevance exhibit variation: in Kenya and Serbia, strategic indirect contributions predominate, whereas in Georgia there is a proportional mix of both. The emphasis on strategic indirect interventions, suitable for contexts in which corruption is a systemic issue, such as in Kenya and Serbia, aligns with the policy. Conversely, the large presence of direct strategic interventions in Georgia, where corruption is not systemic and where there is a strong pull factor in the form of the hard-gained EU candidacy, is also in line with the policy. However, because a

broad political settlement that demonstrates readiness and anti-corruption drive already exists in Kenya, a greater emphasis on strategic direct interventions is merited.

In all cases, the supported contributions lacked systematic integration measures, and personnel struggle to see how integrating measures such as public participation or integrity into each contribution can drive anti-corruption change. This lack of clarity fosters a degree of resignation among personnel towards the idea of systematic integration. Such resignation is further intensified by the fact that corruption as a development obstacle is not an official perspective in Swedish development cooperation, making personnel less likely to prioritize it.

A noteworthy challenge in policy implementation is the hesitancy among program officers to fully embrace the importance of theories of anti-corruption change. The theories of change underpinning anti-corruption interventions in Kenya and Georgia were unclear and unexplicit, both to the program officers and to the evaluators. The situation in Serbia is better, not least in terms of the program officers' willingness to think about causal mechanisms in a systematic way. Moreover, a number of contributions are rationalized, albeit only orally and not in project documentation, by multiple theories of change. In all cases, theories of anti-corruption change are not documented in the contribution materials.

While Sida personnel in the partner countries seemed to understand that an intervention that is successful in one context may fail in another, there is a notable lack of appreciation among program officers of the importance of having a clearly defined theory of change. Without it, attributing impact to a specific intervention becomes nearly impossible, thereby limiting opportunities for evidence-accumulation, systematic learning, innovation, and experimentation.

To summarize, our analysis revealed a moderate level of adherence to and implementation of Sida's anti-corruption approach among program officers in the three countries. The most significant

challenge lies in program officers' reluctance to embrace theories of anti-corruption change, limiting the potential for evidence-accumulation and innovation, thus hindering the potential of efforts to reduce corruption. Furthermore, while such efforts largely align with the goals of the relevant Swedish government strategies and the developmental priorities of the three partner countries, and are relevant to the contexts in which they take place, the potential of these efforts is constrained by the extremely challenging socio-economic and political conditions that exist.

Conclusions and reflections

The literature offers no straightforward answer or clear guidance on how to address corruption operationally. It is therefore highly commendable that Sida's policy fully acknowledges the scale and complexity of the problem and reflects the latest advancements in anti-corruption literature. Given the range of competing frameworks on anti-corruption change, Sida's anti-corruption efforts would benefit from development cooperation and partner organization personnel recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, as well as their potential implications for programming. Achieving this requires dedicated training to ensure that the personnel is well-equipped to navigate and apply these theories effectively.

Table 4: Accumulated knowledge: findings and implications

Finding	Implications
Four frameworks dominate the anti-corruption scholarship, each supported by varying degrees of empirical evidence, with no single framework emerging as the definitive paradigm.	It is essential that development cooperation professionals recognize both the strengths and limitations of each framework. A relevant anti-corruption strategy has a motivated description of the nature of corruption and provides a logical and sufficiently nuanced narrative of how anti-corruption change may occur.

Table 5: Relevance of Sida's anti-corruption approach (policy) to accumulated knowledge: findings and implications

Finding	Implications
All four main frameworks are considered, but there remains an incomplete understanding of the facilitators of collective action, as well as of the insights from the sectoral and organizational literatures. Theories of change underlying advocated interventions are somewhat ambiguous, particularly in indirect interventions and measures of systematic integration.	This knowledge gap poses a risk to the successful implementation of the policy.

Sida's policy asserts that corruption is a systemic and endemic issue in most of the partner countries where Sida operates. Therefore, it must be addressed through indirect, context-specific, and preventative interventions, and through the systematic integration of anti-corruption into all of Sida's development efforts.

While this approach is indeed relevant to the accumulated knowledge, the main challenge remains in bridging the gap between a sound conceptual understanding of the problem and the practical implementation of solutions in interventions.

Our analysis identified a need for clearer guidance on how scholarly insights into corruption, which are often highly abstract, can be translated into practical actions in the day-to-day development cooperation. At the conceptual level, Sida calls for the systematic integration of five principles or "spaces": accountability, transparency, participation, integrity, and efficiency. While these principles are sometimes cited straightforwardly in Sida's documents as the inverse of corruption, the processes through which accountability, transparency, and participation can lead to enhanced integrity and efficiency – and consequently reduce corruption – are multifaceted. Greater attention to unpacking the specific mechanisms and possible causal paths through which each of these "spaces" might contribute to reducing corruption, as well as possible pitfalls, would aid both Sida staff and its partners refine their anti-corruption efforts. We address these issues further in the recommendations section below.

Regarding the integration of the anti-corruption approach in Swedish international development cooperation at the level of government strategies, the evaluation reveals that the development perspective is not yet fully incorporated. However, there has been a significant increase in the share of strategies that explicitly aim to reduce corruption, through the articulation of goals or activities, compared to 2011. This indicates a positive trend toward greater integration.

Based on the survey data of 149 program officers in partner countries, we assessed 15 individual facets of anti-corruption policy implementation. Based on this, we concluded that the overall adherence by embassy staff to Sida's policy on reducing corruption as an obstacle to development is moderate.

Our analysis of the implementation of the policy in three countries also revealed a moderate level of adherence to Sida's anti-corruption approach among program officers. The most significant challenge identified is program officers' reluctance to embrace the importance of having well-defined theories of change for each anti-corruption intervention, which hinders the effectiveness and potential impact of efforts to reduce corruption. Moreover, anti-corruption efforts face competition from Sida's five 'official' perspectives, often resulting in their deprioritization by personnel. Additionally, Sida's anti-corruption infrastructure has not been successful in consistently transmitting the necessary messages across to staff at Swedish embassies.

Recommendations

Corruption constitutes a major hindrance to sustainable development across all sectors. In light of this and the findings presented above, our recommendation is that Sida intensifies its already commendable efforts to combat corruption as an obstacle to development by focusing on the following areas:

1. **Strengthen policy**: update and refine the policy to incorporate relevant knowledge and the latest insights, enhancing the design and effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions.

2. **Leverage policy expertise**: deploy Sida's policy expertise to support country offices in crafting tailored anti-corruption strategies and interventions.

3. **Integrate anti-corruption**: incorporate anti-corruption objectives into all aspects of Swedish international development cooperation strategies to ensure a unified and comprehensive approach.

4. **Prioritize anti-corruption efforts**: officially designate anti-corruption as a fundamental perspective in Swedish development cooperation to counteract the deprioritization of anti-corruption efforts and to mitigate the domination of the risk perspective.

These recommendations are especially important during this period of substantial reorganization of Swedish aid (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023). Although the goal of reducing corruption features in a new strategic direction for Swedish development cooperation, it is not one of its priorities. Our evaluation points to the importance of the Swedish government to build on and expand Sida's unique expertise as a paragon of anti-corruption efforts within the international development cooperation community. Sida's anti-corruption efforts have contributed to preventing the exploitation of public authority and trust for personal gain.

Scaling back Sida's anti-corruption efforts risks allowing the modus operandi of corruption to evolve beyond our comprehension, hindering effective countermeasures. This would signal a retreat to those benefiting from corruption and undermine Sida's goal of improving conditions for people living in poverty and oppression.