



## Sida, Knowledge, Learning and Capacity<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

A number of trends have led development cooperation agencies to embrace the idea of becoming "knowledge agencies", more efficient and effective users of knowledge both internally and in their work with their Southern partners. At the same time, agencies have become fascinated with the role that knowledge can play in national development strategies in the South.

This paper seeks to examine the discourses and practices of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in terms of our broader concerns with knowledge-based aid (King 2002; McGrath 2002a). However, what is perhaps most important in the case of Sida is the way that accounts of learning and capacity are often of higher importance than those of knowledge. The main focus of this paper, therefore, will be on the nature of the interplay between these three concepts in Sida's discourses and practices. This will contribute to a better understanding of the concept of knowledge-based aid as applied to development cooperation agencies more generally and the extent to which it is an inevitable trend.

The paper is based on the analysis of a series of interviews we have conducted with Sida staff, policy documents, research reports and other official texts from Sida and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and, significantly, written accounts by Sida staff about their work and the operation and vision of the organisation as a whole.<sup>2</sup> As will become clear subsequently, these accounts by senior Sida staff past and present provide an invaluable insight into the workings of the organisation and are generally characterised by a highly reflexive approach. Participation in a one-day seminar with more than 30 Sida staff on knowledge, learning and capacity also greatly informed this analysis.<sup>3</sup>

After a brief historical overview, we shall explore a series of accounts about Sida's approach to knowledge, learning and capacity, which both interlink and, to some extent, contradict each other. We shall then analyse the ways in which knowledge appears to be present (and absent) in key policy documents. After this, we will examine briefly some of what could be termed Sida's knowledge and learning projects. Then we shall explore the nature of learning-based practice within Sida, before providing a concluding overview.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a product of the "Learning to Make Policy" project, part of the ESRC's "Future Governance Programme", L216259023.

<sup>2</sup> It also is influenced by earlier work on Sida Ministry for Foreign Affairs by one of the authors (King 1988; King and Caddell 1998).

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank all the Sida staff who contributed to our work. In particular, we should like to thank Dr Ingemar Gustafsson, Head of the Methods Unit, who facilitated our visits to Sida and organised the workshop.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A number of texts and interviews point to the perceived importance of Sida's history for understanding its current way of working and attitudes towards issues such as learning, knowledge and capacity. It is worth, therefore, briefly outlining this history.

Although Sweden's first treaty with an African state can be dated to 1650, and there is a long tradition of scientific, trade and missionary encounter (Widstrand 1986; Wohlgemuth 2001), Swedish aid to Africa (and to Asia) began formally in the 1950s with major programmes of support to Ethiopia and Pakistan (Heppling 1986; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1998).<sup>4</sup> In 1962 the Agency for International Assistance (NIB) was set up (Heppling 1986). Its overall goal was determined by the Swedish Parliament: "to improve the quality of life of poor peoples" (quoted in Sida 1996a: 1). Significantly, this pledge was backed by a major financial commitment. The NIB became SIDA<sup>5</sup> in 1965 and in 1968 Sweden committed itself to putting 1% of GDP into its aid budget (Wohlgemuth 2001: 51).<sup>6</sup> In 1977 four sub-goals were added to the overall goal of Swedish development policy:

- Economic growth
- Socio-economic equality
- Economic and political independence
- Democratic development. (Ljunggren 1986; Sida 1996a)

In 1988 "sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment" was added, followed in 1996 by "fostering equal rights for women and men" (Sida 1996a). In this way, Sida was ahead of the current trend of a number of donors to establish a poverty super-goal as well as a set of sub-goals on gender, democracy, environment, etc. (Working Group for International Cooperation in Skills Development 2002).

SIDA also anticipated another key element of the new way of working with its strong emphasis during the 1960s on sectoral programmes (Wohlgemuth 1998).<sup>7</sup> Such programmes gave countries considerable flexibility over how Swedish money could be spent within a broad, agreed framework. In the 1970s this evolved into a position where Sweden became less proactive in such relationships, leaving most of the decision making to the Southern partner (Edgren 1986 and 1997; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1998). This approach was to be radically revised in the 1980s as Sweden moved closer to the new Neo-liberal orthodoxy and became a supporter of structural adjustment and ever heavier conditionalities (Edgren 1997; Olukoshi 1997a and b; Wohlgemuth 1998). At the same time, the downward pressure on the Swedish development

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<sup>4</sup> Building on Sweden's special missionary relationship with Ethiopia, the country was given US\$2 million in loans in 1945. This was used to hire Swedes to help in post-war reconstruction (Heppling 1986: 16).

<sup>5</sup> SIDA refers to the pre-merger agency; Sida to the post; see below.

<sup>6</sup> This target was not reached until 1975. Since then, Sida's official development assistance budget has always been above the agreed target of 0.7% GDP. Sweden is one of four countries to have met the target consistently (the others are Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway).

<sup>7</sup> Although one can easily get the sense that sectoral programmes were a new discovery of the late 1990s, Sida was not alone in thinking in terms of such programmes back in the 1960s. A very interesting chapter in this regard is one by Hirschman (1971: ch. 10) where he critiques the USAID sectoral approach of the 1960s in a manner that has considerable resonance for current debates.

budget from growing conservatism at home led to increased attention to efficiency and a search for performance criteria for SIDA's work (Edgren 1997).

The second half of the 1990s saw a further shift in Sida's approach to development cooperation. On the one hand, this should be located in broader agency trends, linked to the International Development Targets (IDTs), sector programmes, etc. However, the change must also be situated in the emergence of the "new" Sida in 1995. That year saw the merger of the Swedish International Development Agency with three smaller organisations. The oldest of these was the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), established in 1975. The other partners to the merger were the Swedish Agency for Technical Cooperation (established 1980) and SwedeCorp (established 1992). The new organisation retained the name Sida, although with a new full title of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. SAREC is now a distinct department within the "new" Sida and important elements of its historical perspective appear to have continued into the new Sida. As we shall explore in greater detail below, SAREC has brought into the merged organisation an important emphasis on knowledge generation and on capacity development.

One of the first priorities of the merged Sida was to develop a new strategy; one that responded to the new agency trends. To this end, four "Action Programmes" were developed by 1997 that sought to develop Sida-wide responses to cross-cutting issues. Linked to Sida's stated goals, these four programmes were on:

- equality between women and men
- sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction
- peace, democracy and human rights
- environmentally sustainable development.

The late 1990s also saw the rethinking of Sweden's relationship with its two major partner regions: Africa and Asia. As Sida is an agency of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, this macro-level reformulation of Swedish development cooperation was not strictly a Sida responsibility. Nonetheless, it makes sense to see a very close relationship between the roles of Sida and the Ministry, and to talk of a Swedish development cooperation vision.

In parallel with processes in other countries and agencies, the development of a new Swedish Africa policy saw a strong emphasis on the notion of partnership. Importantly, this was reflected in the process of policy formulation, with a serious attempt being made to canvass and incorporate the views of Africans, both living in Sweden and in Africa (Kifle, Olukoshi and Wohlgemuth 1997). The vision that emerged was one that put solidarity back at the centre of Sweden's development cooperation philosophy (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1998). There was considerable talk about ethics and attitudes, as well as an emphasis on capacity development in Africa, including in research.

The Asia policy was less focused on the challenges of developing genuine partnership but more reflective of a belief that Asian countries were better positioned to be equal partners in a relationship that was more about cooperation than aid (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1999). As we shall see subsequently, this differentiated approach to Africa and Asia is at the heart of

bifurcated strategies, for and assumptions about, knowledge, learning and capacity, as well as partnership.

## **SIDA'S DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING AND CAPACITY**

In this first main part of the paper we shall examine the way that knowledge and learning are talked about in important Sida documents. This will take us from a discussion of knowledge and development; through knowledge and research; and Sida as a learning organisation; on to capacity development. Finally, a note of dissonance will be added through a consideration of Sida's information technology policy.

### **Sida's account of the relationship between knowledge and development**

Although it is by no means the sole or dominant theme in Sida discourse, an account of the importance of knowledge for development can be clearly found in the core statement of Sida's vision: *Sida Looks Forward* (Sida 1997c). This vision can be seen in the following quotations:

Knowledge is our most important resource. During the next five years we shall implement an investment programme for the long-term renewal of knowledge and skills in our partner countries, of our Swedish partners and at Sida. (Sida 1997c)

In all operational programmes the development of knowledge, in the widest sense of the term, is the most important working method. (Sida 1997c)

The central issue of all development cooperation is to contribute to developing knowledge - in the partner country, in Sweden, and internationally. (Sida 1997c)

These quotations indicate a multi-focused concern with knowledge. First, "Knowledge is **our** most important resource" (emphasis added); knowledge is what Sida comes to the development cooperation relationship with. However, the following sentence immediately makes clear that Sida is not in the business of simply transferring Swedish knowledge to Southern partners who have a knowledge deficit. Rather, the sentence highlights one of the core elements of current Sida thinking in stating that knowledge development must also take place in Sida and in its Swedish partners. As we shall show subsequently, this tripartite formulation is of considerable significance to the way that Sida thinks and works. Indeed, this quotation illustrates the thinking behind our choice of title for this paper. Although the quotation is explicitly about knowledge, it is also, implicitly, very much about the need for learning. Indeed, we will suggest that Sida regularly privileges learning over knowledge, as a more active and collaborative concept. As we shall argue in more detail later, this quotation also points to the importance of building capacity within the three constituencies for them to be effective development actors. Thus, although the first quotation begins with knowledge, it leads on to an underlying stress on the importance of learning and capacity development. Such a reading can also be gleaned from the second and third quotations.

From our interviews, it appears that the current Director-General of Sida, Bo Göransson, has been interested in the range of arguments about knowledge and development, including the knowledge economy, since his appointment in 1995. This was reflected in his commissioning of a thinkpiece on the knowledge debates even before the notion of "the knowledge bank" captured James Wolfensohn's attention at the World Bank in September 1996 (McGrath 2002b). This is of potentially great significance for our study as a whole. It may suggest that Sida has to some extent read the same economic trends as the World Bank, but has seen these as leading to strikingly different conclusions. Certainly, we shall attempt to show that Sida appears to be taking a very distinct path regarding knowledge and development.

High level concern with knowledge and development can be seen in the existence since early 2001 of a "knowledge group", including several senior Sida staff, which is due to report to the senior management in late 2002. Although this is largely concerned with the relationship between Sida's work in basic and higher education, its main output to date has been a paper (only in Swedish as yet) that revisits the broader range of debates about knowledge (Gustafsson et al. 2001).

The importance of debates about knowledge (and learning and capacity) was also illustrated by the whole day seminar on "Knowledge, Learning and Capacity Development" for which we served as resource persons in March 2002. Much more than a dissemination seminar for a piece of potentially interesting external research, this was a meeting of staff from across Sida to explore issues of importance to their work.

### **Sida, knowledge and research**

Sida's knowledge discourse is very much shaped by the existence of SAREC. The head of SAREC, Berit Olsson, has been at the heart of the Director-General's processes of examining the knowledge debates, and is chairing the "knowledge group". SAREC's most recent policy also makes clear the understanding within that department of the salience of knowledge for development:

Ultimately, development depends on the capacity of a country to steer its development in the desired direction, including the capacity to participate in international cooperation on equal terms. A vital part of this capacity is the ability of society to absorb, develop and apply knowledge. (Sida 2000b: 9)

It is increasingly being recognised that knowledge is as crucial a determinant of development as investment capital, skilled labour and appropriate and accountable institutions. (Sida 2000c: 28)

It is not surprising that this vision should contain a strong sense of the relationship between knowledge and research. However, it is also in line with the emphasis on knowledge as something to be produced rather than simply transferred.

This has been fundamental to SAREC's identity since its establishment in 1975. From its inception, capacity development has been an integral part of its thinking. However, the emphasis

has been primarily on the capacity of the Southern partner rather than the Northern.<sup>8</sup> This is understandable given that the core of SAREC's mission has been to work in a field where the resource disparities between Northern and Southern universities have been large, and often growing larger.

We shall now consider SAREC's account of knowledge in some further detail. SAREC's goal since 1975 has been to support research of development relevance for partner countries (Widstrand 1986; Kihlberg 1987). However, it is important to note that this relevance has always been conceived of broadly:

It was not only a question of supporting applied research or research that could be directly implemented in development plans. Equally important was support to fundamental theoretical and descriptive research that contributed to improving basic knowledge and created a deeper understanding of the processes and problems of change. (Kihlberg 1987: 9)

Research was to be guided wherever possible by the expressed priorities of partners, rather than being driven by Swedish conceptions of important themes (SAREC and SIDA 1992). SAREC also emphasised the need to address research capacity at the national level. Whereas other agencies tended to support single institutions, SAREC was concerned from the start with systemic and policy issues.

In its current policy SAREC makes a distinction between "general" (Sida 2000b) or "modern" (Sida 2000c) knowledge and "local" (Sida 2000b) or "traditional" (Sida 2000c) knowledge. Although these two sets of opposites are not necessarily identical, they lead to similar conclusions. First, that globalisation is encouraging a greater gap between knowledge production in the North (here meaning primarily through industrial research and development) and the contexts of the South. Second, that there is a need to mediate between the two sets of knowledge. Third, that research cooperation can play this bridging role. There is little sense here of the current interest of some other agencies with indigenous knowledge. Instead, SAREC seems to have a rather more scientific and technical conception of knowledge. It is possible that it also leads to a greater sense of deficit and transfer than in other elements of Sida's discourse.

However, this notion of Sweden having the knowledge does need to be tempered by SAREC's strong emphasis on national ownership of the research agenda, in partnership with Sweden:

Until recent years, with a few exceptions, research cooperation was characterised by research by industrialised countries "for" rather than "with" developing countries. From the early 1990s, however, there seems to be a growing trend towards greater "partnership". Large international research programmes now invite decision-makers from developing countries to participate in the formulation and implementation of research agenda that address the interests of the South. International and regional forums have been, and are being, created to this end. One talks more often now of

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<sup>8</sup> In the case of knowledge about Africa, it could be argued that Sweden's own capacity development was taken care of at the same time as the establishment of NIB through the establishment of the Institute of African Studies at Uppsala, later to become the Nordic Africa Institute (Widstrand 1986).

partnership in, and dialogue for, identifying research problems that take account of local conditions in the developing world. The “partnership” approach implies that the “recipe” is not pre-determined but grows out of an interactive process. (Sida 2000c: 27)

In spite of the growing inter-agency orthodoxy on the IDTs, on poverty and on primary education during the second half of the 1990s, Sida significantly expanded rather than contracted its support to higher education and research. Whilst arguments about globalisation and the knowledge economy are part of the justification for this, an attempt has also been made to claim broader development impacts for research cooperation:

Positive and sustainable development, including the eradication of poverty, requires the development and use of new knowledge:

Knowledge, which can provide farmers on marginal soils with the opportunity to obtain a greater yield without destroying soil and water resources; knowledge, which makes it possible to combat HIV/AIDS with educational and health care resources that are a fraction of those available in wealthier countries; or knowledge, which promotes conflict resolution, a democratic culture and democratic institutions in societies in order to prevent wars, dictatorships and ethnic conflicts. (Sida 2000b: 8)

### **Sida as a learning organisation**

There are two principal routes through which the notion of Sida as a learning organisation diffuses across the agency. First, the work programme of the Expert Group for Development Issues (EGDI) has placed a major emphasis on learning. Second, and more centrally to Sida’s work, the existence of a Unit for Organisational Learning within Sida clearly has an impact on the theories, policies and practices of the agency as a whole.

EGDI was established in 1995 “to initiate studies that have a potential to make contributions to development thinking and policy making” (EGDI 2001). It is chaired by the Secretary of State for Development Cooperation in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs but it has Sida representation, as well as participation from Swedish and foreign academics. It has made learning central to its mandate and this has resulted in two large products: “Organisational learning in development cooperation” (Forss, Cracknell and Stromquist 1997) and *Learning in Development Cooperation* (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (eds.) 2000a).

However, as a chapter in the Carlsson and Wohlgemuth book makes clear, the concern with Sida’s learning capabilities has a longer provenance. Back in 1988 the Swedish National Audit Office conducted an extensive examination of SIDA practices based on a large number of interviews of SIDA staff and staff from other development cooperation agencies. The report, “Lär sig SIDA?” (“Does Sida learn?”), emphasised issues of policy consistence, leadership and personnel policy as blocks to SIDA’s effectiveness as a learning organisation (cited in Edgren 2000).

The Forss et al. report is an exploration of agencies as learning organisations that reflects the very real challenges that exist in achieving this aspiration. Much of this is reminiscent of the discussion about the limitations to knowledge-based approaches that are illustrated, for instance, in the case of the World Bank (King and McGrath 2000; Denning 2001; King 2002).

The Carlsson and Wohlgemuth anthology is more focused on the experiences of researchers, policymakers and practitioners and their reflections on how these relate to the broader issue of learning in development cooperation.

What emerges from both accounts is a belief in the importance of learning for development cooperation. This is in a number of ways a more dynamic and satisfying account than one based on knowledge. It stresses both the personal and organisational and contains a notion of development at each level. It is not simply about the mechanics of capturing, managing or sharing what is already known, but contains a sense of new creation. Moreover, it is a strongly nuanced account. Whilst the more academic Argyris and Schön (1978) and the more celebratory and populist Senge (1990) provide accounts of the power of organisational learning, the story is ultimately one of struggle and of obstacles to change. This view is clear in the Swedish accounts too. The sense is that there are important benefits to be gained from Sida embracing a learning approach, but there are major barriers to this. Moreover, these are a mixture of structural, cultural and political elements that cannot easily be overcome.

Although a number of Sida staff are aware of the work of EGDI, there appear to be quite serious limits to the extent that Sida has learned from these attempts to investigate its learning. However, a more concrete impact on the working of Sida has come from the Unit for Organisational Learning, whose activities have reached a significant number of Sida staff.

Established in 1997, the Unit can be seen as a conduit for spreading Senge's theory of the learning organisation throughout Sida. It stresses the importance of changing the organisational culture through addressing systems, incentives and resources. We shall return to look at the Unit as a "knowledge project" subsequently. However, for the moment we shall seek to outline the key elements of its philosophy.

As its name indicates, the Unit is very much about learning. Its philosophy stresses the importance of inculcating a learning culture and providing opportunities for learning for all staff. This notion of learning includes a language of competence, skills and knowledge. In her presentation to the March 2002 "Knowledge, Learning and Capacity Development" seminar, the Unit's Director, Gisela Wasmouth, made clear the importance of tacit knowledge<sup>9</sup> to organisational learning. Strikingly, this small part of her larger presentation was the one that all of those responding to her paper addressed. It appears that the issue of dealing with tacit knowledge is one of considerable salience to staff in a number of different parts of Sida.

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<sup>9</sup> The emergence of the knowledge management debate in the late 1990s led to a revisiting of earlier, philosophical concerns about the nature of knowledge. In particular, the distinction between tacit knowledge, held by individuals internally, and codified or explicit knowledge, written down systematically, entered into corporate, and thence agency, discourses. This led to the work of philosophers such as Polanyi (1958 and 1967) being referred to in such circles.



The language of tacit knowledge use appears superficially to be reminiscent of a major thrust of the knowledge management literature as it emerged in the management literature and corporate sector. For instance, one of the most cited books on knowledge management is called *If only we Knew what we Know* (O'Dell et al., 1998). This concern with "capturing" tacit knowledge is also in evidence in corporate attempts to develop databases and "electronic yellow pages" detailing the knowledge within the organisation. The agency interest in knowledge management is also closely linked to this issue of capturing tacit knowledge. This is most strikingly illustrated in examples from the World Bank, such as the Tacit Knowledge Download and the "nuggets" that have been codified by the various Advisory Services in the different sectors.<sup>10</sup> However, both the Unit and Sida more generally seem very resistant to the technological approaches to tacit knowledge that have emerged through the knowledge management trend.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the Sida discourse appears to be far more concerned with ways that staff can work together to share tacit knowledge and build explicit knowledge.

### **Sida's narratives of capacity building and institutional development**

Capacity is perhaps even more important a notion in current Sida philosophy than learning, although the two notions are closely intertwined. Over its 40 years of existence Sida has operated with a series of approaches to capacity building that reflect shifting positions on knowledge and learning, and the role of the South with respect to these. Beginning in the 1960s, Sida had a model of capacity building and technical assistance that was based in "a traditional concept of transfer of knowledge from those in agencies and in the rich countries who have knowledge to those who have not" (Gustafsson 2000: 1). Learning was to follow a linear path with the South learning from the existing knowledge of the North. Issues of context and adaptation were of limited importance.

In the late 1970s, a second notion began to take hold: that of organisational development. Here the emphasis shifted from the strengthening of individual competences in partner countries to developing the capacity of the organisations in which they worked. However, the notion was still primarily one of a Southern deficit. The emphasis on the organisational level was also mirrored in the approach of SAREC, established in 1975.

By the late 1980s there had been 25 years' worth of experience in technical cooperation-based capacity development. The value of this was to be seriously questioned by a cross-Nordic study of projects in East Africa (Forss et al. 1988). This found that technical cooperation often

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<sup>10</sup> The Tacit Knowledge Download is a scheme designed to capture the tacit knowledge of staff on retirement. "Nuggets" are synthesised pieces of information that represent World Bank wisdom on a range of potential development questions from staff members of clients.

<sup>11</sup> Although Gisela Wasmouth did attend the July 2000 Brighton workshop on "Knowledge Management for International Development Organisations", neither she nor her Sida colleagues could be described as believers in the knowledge management approach. This scepticism about broader agency trends regarding knowledge were also evident in a number of interview comments about other initiatives such as the Global Development Network and the Development Gateway. Sida has declined to be a major funder of either of these initiatives. It is a matter for speculation whether the Swedish scepticism about these World Bank-led projects owes something to the Swedish tradition of distancing itself from the Bank (Andréen 1986).

weakened rather than strengthened partner country capacity. Too many decisions were taken by donors and too little attention was paid to existing national capacity. Crucially, the report also concluded that technical cooperation required far more than just technical skills on the part of the Nordic actors.

This criticism led SIDA to reconsider what the purpose of capacity development was. The following year, a SIDA response argued that:

Twenty five years of experience convincingly shows that if a programme is to result in lasting improvements, knowledge and skills must be developed and structures and institutions built up within the recipient countries. .... Competence development is essentially a question of individual learning. (SIDA 1989: 1)

This report stressed the need to focus more on learning processes. In keeping with the Forss Report, it also recommended that Swedish personnel should only be used when it was clear that there was no relevant capacity already present in the country.

In 1992, a more formal statement of Sida policy on capacity was made: *Development is People* (SIDA 1992). This suggested that technical cooperation had largely failed to achieve its objective of developing capacity. It argued that the capital dimension of cooperation had been privileged over the knowledge dimension. Indeed, an account of knowledge was central to this policy paper:

The theory behind the transfer of knowledge was that knowledge is a resource that exists in industrial countries, which can be exported to developing countries. The supposition could be supported in that there is an international data base of knowledge which is at present concentrated in the industrialised countries and which all countries want and need access to. However experience has shown that the transfer of knowledge can only happen under certain very specific circumstances. Even in the future there will of course be a certain need for occasional "transferers" of knowledge within Swedish development assistance, but the main emphasis in the future must use a different basic theory on development and learning, i.e., the competence that must be developed in recipient countries is that which will function as a dynamic and creative force. This idea presupposes that knowledge must be actively acquired rather than [sic] passively accepted. .... The technical solutions created by the western world may be of value, but they must be modified or perhaps rediscovered when they are woven together with local experience and cultural patterns. .... Knowledge is not a ready made package, ready for delivery from the industrial world to transplant into the developing country environment. Useful knowledge is acquired during the work process. (SIDA 1992: 2-3)

Thus, we can see that SIDA policy in 1992 was already strongly emphasising the importance of knowledge in context, of adaptation and of local discovery. These were to be issues that would move closer to the development cooperation centre-stage at the end of the 1990s as the "knowledge bank" was given a stronger intellectual underpinning during Stiglitz's brief period as World Bank Vice-President (King 2002).

In 1995, the “Mission statement” of the new Sida stated that “our principle method is capacity and institution development” (Sida 1995). This led to the formation of a working group on capacity development and to a new policy (Sida 2000a). This account is influenced by the new institutional economics, and by the work of Douglass North (1990) in particular.<sup>12</sup> This has led to a new emphasis on institutional development. In such a vision, the building of a critical mass of researchers and educators in partner countries is not enough to ensure capacity remains in place. Rather, attention must also be paid to systemic level issues.

The new policy is closely in line with the 1992 policy’s concerns with a more symmetrical view of knowledge and learning, as its lead author makes clear:

solutions to complex social and political problems are always “local”. Solutions can be stimulated by but not solved through transfer of knowledge of analytical frameworks, foreign experts or in other ways.

This conclusion is more than playing with words if seen against the background of the so called knowledge gap and the wide-spread belief in the potential of transfer of information and hence of solution that is opened through the new information technology. Unless there is capacity in countries to analyse their own situation and experience and relate it what exists elsewhere this is not likely to be the case. Therefore it is absolutely essential that priority is given to strengthening of national systems of education and research. That is a cornerstone in any strategy that aims at building Policy Research Capacity. This is emphasised in the new Sida policy on capacity development. (Gustafsson 2000: 2)

This makes clear the contextual nature of knowledge and the importance of exchange and joint creation of knowledge rather than its transfer. This also implies a nuanced model of knowledge creation in which political and cultural factors matter more than simple technical issues. In this model, the role of outside agencies such as Sida changes from being a provider of knowledge to acting as a partner in learning (Gustafsson 2001).

However, it is apparent that there are two tendencies at work in Sida’s conception of partnership and capacity development. This is described internally as the tension between being a “dialogue partner” and a “facilitator”.

In the first case, Sida is being driven by the implications of its strong support for sectoral programmes, budgetary support and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. This leads to a dual focus on developing policy and ensuring financial probity. There is concern within Sida that the notion of dialogue partnership has seen too much of an emphasis on what Sida already knows (or believes). Part of the concern of the capacity development focus is with stressing what Sida staff need to learn in order to be good dialogue partners. On the other hand, there is also a sense of the importance of Southern partners learning how better to choose from alternative strategies and resist agencies’ pressures, where this is necessary.

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<sup>12</sup> The influence of North’s thinking can also be seen in the Sida-funded collection, *Institution Building and Leadership in Africa* (Wohlgemuth, Carlsson and Kifle 1998).

In the second case, the emphasis is much more on twinning. This is based in a notion that the partners already have the requisite knowledge and that Sida can simply facilitate them. Twinning is based in a philosophy of mutual learning, rather than knowledge transfer:

A key word in twinning cooperation is *learning*. The twinned organisations work together with the aid of a combination of long-term advisors and commuting short-term experts, of training in the form of courses and on-the-job training, study visits to Sweden etc. The aspiration is to make learning possible, not merely for individuals but for the entire organisation, in order to create sustainable effects. One way to achieve these effects is to ensure that contacts between the organisations take place at different levels in the hierarchy, in parallel and simultaneously. (Sida 2000d: 2) [emphasis in original]

However, there is a growing sense that Swedish partners in particular should also understand Sida's philosophy of cooperation<sup>13</sup> and the importance of its model of capacity development.

As with other elements of Swedish development cooperation strategy, this dual approach is largely seen as being regionally differentiated. Thus, Eastern Europe and Asia are seen as natural twinning partners; Africa and Latin America as more suitable for dialogue partnerships.

Across the elements of Sida's capacity development approach, the tripartite focus of *Sida Looks Forward* (Sida 1997c) is made apparent. Capacity development is about learning and knowledge development within Sida, its Swedish partners and its Southern partners.

### Sida and information

We have shown in this paper how discourses about knowledge and learning intersect in Sida. We have shown elsewhere how there is a similar intersection between accounts of knowledge and information in DFID (McGrath 2002a) and the World Bank (King 2002). This also can be seen to some extent in Sida.

In 1999, Sida produced a *Strategy for IT in Development Cooperation* (Sida 1999c). This stresses the importance of information technologies for development. It is mainly focused on infrastructure for bridging the digital divide, an area where it considers that Sweden has comparative advantage.

The language that it uses is very close to that used elsewhere for knowledge. This is even clearer in the background report for the strategy (Sida 1999d). This draws heavily on the network economy ideas of Manuel Castells (1996), which are closely related to knowledge economy arguments. It contains a strong information management focus that emphasises the need for a database that appears very similar to elements of the Development Gateway (King 2002). There

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to remember, though, that many Swedish civil society organisations have had Southern links for far longer than Sida. Indeed, much of the pressure for the establishment of a national development cooperation agency came from the Central Committee for Technical Assistance to Less Developed Countries, founded in 1952 by NGOs representing churches, trade unions, employers and many others (Heppling 1986; Lewin 1986)

is also a strong call for support for the International Development Markup Language (IDML) initiative, itself also related to the Gateway during its early discussions. This seeks to develop a common computer language through which development data can be tagged, collected and analysed. The report also points to agreements Sida has made to collaborate with infoDev, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and Bellanet. infoDev is a World Bank programme to support ICT innovation and infrastructural development. The GKP also had its home in the World Bank till the middle of 2001 and is a network for sharing information about knowledge for development. Bellanet is a project of the Canadian International Development Research Centre. It has been a major force in the spread of knowledge management ideas across the development community and in the IDML initiative.

These initiatives with which Sida is working, and the whole emphasis of this policy, are at the informational and technological end of the spectrum of knowledge activities. This is in stark contrast to the learning focus of much of what we have examined so far in this paper. Of course, there is room for diversity within an agency's strategy. However, the IT strategy is not positioned explicitly as complementary to other elements of Sida's work and reads very much as an independent approach that potentially conflicts with a broader philosophical approach to learning and knowledge.

## **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**

Our attention thus far has been on Sida's multi-layered discourse about knowledge and learning. Now we shall turn our gaze to the ways in which these discourses appear embedded (or not) in Sida's main documents: what can be termed its "knowledge products" (McGrath 2002a)

### **Sida's Action Programmes**

The most significant policy documents of Sida are the Action Programmes.<sup>14</sup> These were finalised in 1996 and 1997. They seek to provide an overall policy vision for four cross-cutting themes, drawing on the statutory goals of the agency laid down by Parliament:

- equality between women and men (Sida 1997a)
- sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction (Sida 1996a)
- peace, democracy and human rights (Sida 1997b)
- environmentally sustainable development (Sida 1996b).

These are then the basis for specific commitments and activities within all of the sectoral departments.

What is striking about the Action Programmes when compared to documents of similar importance from the World Bank or DFID (e.g. the Target Strategy Papers) is that they are rather modest in their presentation and visibility. Although they are the core of Sida's work, they are

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<sup>14</sup> We are aware that the current consultations on the Global Committee on Development Cooperation may lead to new priorities for Sida.

not immediately visible on Sida's website.<sup>15</sup> Instead of glossy covers and layouts, they come in a traditional A4 layout with no pictures and little in the way of text formatting. There is nothing in the presentation that suggests the marketing that is present in many World Bank or DFID documents. This may have something to do with their age, although other agencies were paying more attention to presentation by 1996-7.

The reliance of the DFID Target Strategy Papers on a relatively narrow set of Northern sources has been noted (McGrath 2002a). Similar criticisms have been advanced about a range of World Bank documents. There is relatively little referencing evident across the four Action Programmes. This makes it difficult to judge the extent to which there was engagement with external academic or development communities. Where the Action Programmes clearly are a significant step forward is that they are explicitly about intra-agency learning. Each of them includes a section where specific actions by each Sida department are listed.

Given the timing of the Action Programmes in 1996 and 1997, it is problematic to examine them in terms of their knowledge focus. The World Development Report: *Knowledge for Development* (World Bank 1998) was still another one or two years away, and the notion of "the knowledge bank" was little known outside Bank headquarters. Whilst Göransson had raised the importance of knowledge rhetorically, it had not become a core concern of Sida at the operational level. However, given Sida's language of partnership and learning, there do seem to be valid criticisms of the way that these documents put this language into practice.

### Sida's other knowledge products

Sida continues to produce a significant amount of documents based on its research. More than 70 reports on educational research have been published over the past 20 years in the widely known *Education Division Documents Series*. The Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit publishes two series: *Sida Studies in Evaluation* and *Sida Evaluation*. A range of other, more occasional, reports also are produced by other departments. The importance of research in Sida is illustrated by the very major Project 2015 initiative that was initiated during the process of forming the new Sida. This led to nine volumes that looked at Sida, general issues of aid and development, and the contexts of partner countries and regions (Sida 1996c-f; 1997d-h).

Two other pieces of Swedish research are worth noting, both for their policy significance and for their processes. One of the activities that the new Sida inherited was a Task Force on Poverty Reduction (Sida 1996g). This Task Force is important for its development of a detailed reading of poverty research and its policy implications that is contemporary to the World Summit on Social Development and the emergence of the IDTs from the OECD. It is also significant for being based on considerable new commissioned research from a wide variety of authors, including a number of Southern and non-Swedish Northern researchers. Widespread commentary was also sought from Sida and Ministry staff.

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps appropriately, they are far more visible in Sida's own resource centre in Stockholm.

This participatory approach and links to the external research community was taken further in the process leading to the Swedish Africa policy of 1998. As we noted above, this included extensive consultations with Africans resident in Sweden and a meeting with African commentators in Abidjan. The latter produced a very visible and articulate challenging of Sweden's development cooperation record and its future vision (Kifle, Olukoshi and Wohlgemuth 1997).

Thus, the rather limited evidence from the Action Programmes of external consultation and a research base is somewhat balanced by these examples of far-reaching attempts to engage with external perspectives in constructing Sida's own knowledge.

## **KNOWLEDGE PROJECTS**

We have discussed at some length a number of the key knowledge projects of Sida from the perspective of how they contribute to Sida's overall discourses of knowledge, learning and capacity. However, it is also important to lay out some of the key activities that have resulted from these foci. We shall briefly highlight just three of these: research cooperation, capacity development and organisational learning.

### **Research cooperation**

The 20 years of SAREC's work pre-merger has largely continued in the new Sida. Indeed, its budget has more than doubled since the merger. SAREC continues to provide support to Southern systems of higher education and to partnerships between Southern and Swedish institutions. It seeks to support higher education whilst remaining mindful of broader systems of knowledge generation. SAREC provides funds to Research Councils and universities, which then run research competitions to decide how to use the funds. It also increasingly is supporting ICT use in Southern universities. Through its partnership work, SAREC has traditionally provided funding to joint research programmes between Swedish and Southern universities. However, increasingly it is seeking to limit the support to these partnerships to the added costs of the partnership rather than including support to recurrent costs in the partner institutions. This is more feasible in Asia than Africa. SAREC is also the Swedish conduit for supporting multilateral research activities such as those of the World Health Organisation, the Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research and the Africa Economic Research Consortium.

### **Capacity development**

Capacity development work is organised by the Methods Unit, a small group with responsibility for looking at how Sida's work practices need to change to respond to shifts in development cooperation. This unit is also responsible for related work on Sida's approach to SWAPs and for revising the booklet *Sida at Work* (Sida 1998), which lays out the principles under which staff carry out their various activities. All three programmes are supported by cross-Sida working

groups. The development of policy is intended to be the first step, with subsequent phases of operationalisation of policy documents and development and delivery of training materials. This can lead to a sense of an insular focus on Sida staff's own learning needs. For instance, the booklet, *Sida's Policy for Sector Programme Support and Provisional Guidelines* (Sida 2002) states that it is written

primarily for Sida staff, but can be used by consultants and other who work, on behalf of Sida, with the assessment, implementation and follow-up of sector programme support (Sida 2002: 4).

There is no mention of developing countries being the recipients of these guidelines. However, it is clear that the philosophy of the Methods Unit has a keen sense of the tripartite nature of the learning challenge. Through its collaboration with the training staff in Sida, one can see a stronger emphasis on the other elements of the capacity development approach. For Swedish partners, the new Centre for Civil Society will attempt to develop their capacity as key players in the Swedish vision of expanded bilateralism. For Southern partners, there has been a shift in the focus of training programmes from areas where Sweden thought it had expertise (forestry, hydroelectricity, etc.) to areas that are priorities of partners. Moreover, the emphasis has also shifted towards greater awareness of the knowledge that the partners bring to the course and towards facilitation of networking between the Southern participants after courses have finished.

### Organisational learning

Since its inception in 1997, the Unit for Organisational Learning has developed a range of programmes and activities designed to make Sida more of a learning organisation. Departments are encouraged to analyse their competency needs and to plan accordingly. All managers are required to participate in a programme in which their role as facilitators of learning is particularly emphasised. The Unit encourages working in teams and in projects, as well as mentorship arrangements, as ways of effectively sharing knowledge. Increasingly, the possibilities of e-learning are also being investigated. As a way of mapping the learning activities of Sida, the Unit produces an annual *Human Resources Report*, presenting the wide range of attempts to support learning that are going on. Although there is a perception outside the Unit that it is focused predominantly on generic programmes, it should be noted that it runs a series of introductory modules on the Action Programmes and has recently started programmes for National Programme Officers.<sup>16</sup>

## KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES

What difference have these new discourses and activities made to everyday work in Sida? One positive example of new practices comes from the focus on sector wide programmes. Here it appears that the knowledge challenges inherent in working on sector programmes have made

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<sup>16</sup> These are nationals of Southern partner countries employed by Sida within their own countries.



sectoral staff more dependent on collaboration with colleagues from other disciplines. One example from an education programme is particularly instructive. Whilst education and public administration staff are both in the Department for Democracy and Social Development, it was only because of the requirement to know about finance and management in order to implement a sector programme that educationalists actually started collaborating with their public administration colleagues.

One direction that interest in learning organisation theory has taken in Sida is into reflection on the limits to good learning practice within the organisation. Two of the chapters in the Carlsson and Wohlgemuth chapter exemplify this approach and will be quoted at some length.

Gus Edgren worked in aid administration for thirty years in different parts of the world, for Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as for UN organisations. As some of our earlier citations of Edgren show, he is a strong advocate of the learning organisation approach. However, he points to a range of blockages to learning within Sida. He notes staff complaints about time pressures and poor attention to detail from senior managers. He argues that concerns expressed in the Audit Office Report of 1988 about incentives and grounds for promotion still hold true. Here there is a parallel to our interviews in the World Bank: whereas the rhetoric is of team work (or knowledge sharing in the Bank), the perception of staff is that individualism, competitiveness and disbursement of funds are what get promotion. He also highlights the negative effects on learning of Sida's age structure, which is skewed towards older staff, with long years of service, an issue that has been acknowledged by Sida's Human Resources Department (Sida 2000e). The relatively small numbers of female staff reaching senior positions, he speculates, must also have a negative impact on motivation and learning. Notwithstanding our example above of cross-disciplinary team working on a sector programme, he points to the tendency for team working not to lead to team learning.

Decentralisation is a practice of all the agencies under consideration, as well as a number of others (e.g. the German Agency for Technical Cooperation – GTZ [Bergmann 2001]). Edgren identifies two issues here that also have wider resonance for other agencies.

First, decentralisation does directly engage with current discourses about knowledge, even though this does not appear to have been an important motivation for decentralisation. Decentralisation of authority to the field level opens up an opportunity for a more effective translation of knowledge into practice, as field staff are more able to identify development activities that reflect local contexts. Thus, decentralisation can meet the concern that knowledge is more contextual than universal. However, decentralisation requires a more networked model of knowledge sharing / management (Bergmann 2001). Edgren is concerned that learning is reduced as the mechanisms for knowledge sharing are limited.

Second, he notes that the decentralisation process and learning organisation focus point to the need to reconsider the role of national staff from partner countries working in Swedish development cooperation. He recalls that this was an issue raised in the 1988 Audit Office Report, yet it is still a concern of his more than a decade later:

Field offices are typically staffed with expatriate programme officers who will stay three or four years before they are transferred to another country or to headquarters.

As RRV [the Audit Office] points out, the only institutional memory in such a situation will be the donor's consultants, who normally have a much longer shelf life than programme officers. The multilateral agencies have tried to solve this problem by establishing a separate scheme of service for "national programme officers" (NPOs), a cadre of professionals whose career is based mainly in their home countries. In agencies like UNICEF and UNDP, national programme officers provide a good deal of the agencies' continuity and institutional memory in the country and take part in the organisation's staff training and policy discussion together with international staff.

Sida is also trying to make use of NPOs to provide a continuity platform for decentralisation, but there is still a long way to go before its NPOs can regard themselves as regular staff members of the agency. Changes must be undertaken in the work process at the level of the embassies, to give NPOs more responsible tasks. Sida's internal staff training programmes will have to be opened to NPOs and working material must be produced in other languages than Swedish. And the staff rules applying to local embassy staff regarding, for instance, access to information sources will have to be eased in order to integrate the NPOs in the working team. (Edgren 2000: 48)

Overall he paints a picture of major learning failures:

In some cases, conditions and vested interests are very heavily stacked against absorbing new knowledge. One particularly complex case is the malfunctioning of the aid industry as a system, seen from the point of view of the recipient. The learning blocks may also be caused by a combination of unrealistic political targets, strong commercial interests among consultants or other enterprises and bureaucratic inertia on either side of the partnership, which join forces to resist a proposed innovation. Such resistance is often rationalised by means of an official myth, which is supposed to explain why changes would be impossible or undesirable. Exploding these myths is a key precondition for organisational learning. (ibid.: 65-6)

Edgren makes clear that many of these comments apply to the other agencies he has worked for, and to agencies as a whole. Certainly this accords with our learning from our other case studies. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Sida in this regard is the level of engagement with the theory of learning organisations. Whether this can lead to a more effective response to these learning failures is an important question, yet to be resolved.

Anna Wieslander has now retired from Sida but was Director of its training centre, as well as holding other posts at headquarters and in the field. From her experience in the training of staff and consultants, she raises concerns about the adequacy of preparation for work in the field. Like Edgren, she also points to the negative effect that overwork has on learning. However, she suggests that there are problems of attitude and organisational culture at work here as well.

As a writer I also asked myself why colleagues at Sida normally did not read books, nor Sida's own magazine, describing the reality of aid relations. Their reading, as in fact often my own, was many times restricted to "urgent matters", and did not

normally include contextual or background material. It is of course a question of priorities; their reality was day to day relations with colleagues and bosses and an overwhelming amount of bureaucratic procedures. There was no time, I think, to search for content in their work, or to learn about the needs of their "target groups". (Wieslander 2000: 261)

This quotation highlights something that emerges also from our case studies in DFID and the World Bank. It places a very important question mark against much of the language of knowledge and learning within agencies. Significantly, it suggests that the problem lies both at the organisational and individual level. Part of the significance of this lies in the emphasis from Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the attitudinal dimension of cooperation. Both Karlsson (1997 – then Minister for Development Cooperation) and Gustafsson (1999) talk of a new "code of conduct" for partnership based in values such as humility and openness. Wieslander, however, talks of the historic inadequacies of Swedish development professionals in these areas.

Of course, these are the reflections of experienced Swedish development professionals, reflecting back on a career in this area. It is quite challenging to tease out what in these accounts is a critique of a past that has now been superseded and what still holds true. Nonetheless, there is much in these accounts that coincides with our interviews from Sida and other agencies. Similar findings also emerge from the Forss et al. (1997) study for EGDI. Carlsson and Wohlgemuth's introduction to *Learning in Development Cooperation*, written by a former senior staff member / current Board member (Wohlgemuth) and an experienced consultant for / commentator on Sida (Carlsson) also adds to the picture of the learning challenge that Sida faces. In particular, they raise concerns about how certain important elements of the new aid paradigm impact upon learning within Sida. They argue that sector programmes should be about a long-term focus but that the new knowledge and learning accounts often emphasise short-term learning. Moreover, they argue that the ever-increasing range of themes that development cooperation is expected to address places severe burdens on the capacity to learn. Overall, whilst there are large amounts of information available, often the quality is poor (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth 2000b).

Concern was also raised in some interviews that there should be more learning from other agencies. Whilst professional knowledge networking with the outside has been common, this has not been so obviously linked to a transfer of knowledge into institutional memory, policy or practice. Another issue that emerges from some interviews is a questioning of whether the notion of the learning organisation and business school thinking fits very well with the conventional Swedish way of working.

In common with other agencies, Sida is active in evaluating its work. This is an obvious potential source of learning. Indeed, it is clear that learning is as much part of Sida's evaluation philosophy as is audit. Nonetheless, the quality and effectiveness of this learning has been inadequate. This concern is captured for instance in the title of a Sida paper: "Are evaluations useful?" (Carlsson et al. 1999). This paper, co-authored by the Head of the Evaluation Department (Anne-Marie Fallenius), is impressively open about the weakness of evaluation in terms of learning and knowledge. It argues that evaluation is weak in generating new knowledge. Moreover, there is also inadequate knowledge sharing. In spite of the rhetoric, there is not enough participation by partners, thus limiting their, and Sida's, learning opportunities.

Dissemination mechanisms do not ensure that the knowledge gets to the full range of relevant people. Those at the implementation level have their knowledge extracted for the purpose of evaluation but little is ever returned in terms of an outside perspective on or synthesis of their experiences. Carlsson concludes in another paper that there is little evidence of evaluation leading to significant changes in policies or practices (Carlsson 2000). Sida has recently put into place a mechanism through which departments are required to respond to evaluation reports. However, our interviews suggest that the impact of this remains limited. Departments do not have to learn from evaluations if they do not want to. There has also been some increased attention to partnership in evaluation, but this too remains more aspirational than actual.

## CONCLUSION

The case of Sida contributes important insights into analysis of the knowledge fascination of development cooperation agencies. It is striking that there are a range of Sida texts that highlight the importance of knowledge, stretching back for more than a decade, yet Sida has not followed the knowledge management trends of other agencies.

Sida generally appears deeply suspicious of the technological and deficit assumptions of much of knowledge-based aid. Although knowledge is a concept that is used in Sida, the strong preference is for language about learning. This is an important point that appears to reflect the Swedish democratic tradition of adult learning. This concern with learning opens up a possibility for a practice that is based more in the construction of knowledge than in its dissemination. Moreover, taken together with Sida's discourse of partnership and of capacity development, a positive focus emerges on mutual learning that is led by the South and facilitated by Sida, and other Swedish partners. This is a notion that is far removed from critiques of elements of agency practice as a banking form of knowledge in Freire's (1972) sense of the depositing of knowledge into passive objects from above (in this case the Northern agency).

This view of a mutual construction of knowledge is reflected also in Sida's research cooperation strategy. Since the incorporation of SAREC, Sida is in a unique position in the bilateral community for the scale of support that is given to higher education and Southern knowledge generation directly from the agency.

However, it would be unreasonable to expect a single account of knowledge – learning from an agency as large and diverse as Sida. Thus, it is important to note the far more technological and informational emphasis that comes out of the IT policy. Through a dual focus on better systems for managing inter-agency information and its exchange and on infrastructural development in the South, the policy suggests a reading that is radically different from the bulk of Sida's discourse on knowledge. Here the emphasis appears to be far more on the imperative of better capturing what agencies already know and transmitting it to Southern recipients.

A more agency-centric reading may also be constructed regarding the work of the Methods Unit and the Unit for Organisational Learning. Both units' primary audiences have been Sida staff to date. However, in so far as the organisational learning focus is combined in the current capacity development approach with emphases on development of Swedish and Southern partners, Sida

may have developed an approach that is less internally focused than typical agency knowledge strategies, such as those of DFID (McGrath 2002a) and the World Bank (King 2002).

Our reading of Sida's discourses about knowledge, learning and capacity are relatively positive. However, it is important to consider whether they are matched by its practices. It should be noted in this context that much of what we conclude that is critical here is based in the written analyses of Sida staff or writers of commissioned papers. We say this not so much to justify what we write as to note that this is indicative of a degree of openness and reflexivity that is uncommon amongst agencies. We conclude that the language of partnership and mutual knowledge construction is not as evident as could have been expected when the Action Programmes, Sida's main policy documents, are examined. A similar weakness in engagement with partners also appears from accounts of the evaluation process.

Sida's language about internal learning also appears to have a considerable aspirational element. This is reflected in the large number of points of learning blockage that are identified in the work commissioned by EGDI. On the other hand, the attention to these problems given by EGDI, and the existence of the Unit for Organisational Learning, can be seen as very real indicators of a genuine concern to overcome such blockages.

Learning failures are not simply caused by structural and cultural factors within Sida (or other agencies). There also appears to be an attitudinal dimension. There is considerable emphasis within Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the appropriate attitudes for development cooperation, such as humility and openness. However, Wieslander's account in particular raises the question of whether this is matched in practice by the attitudes of staff.

The case of Sida points to strengths of vision and challenges of building it into the full range of practices. However, where it is most significant is in illustrating that convergence across agencies is not inevitable in the area of knowledge-based aid. By taking up elements of the knowledge discourse rather than others; and in emphasising learning over knowledge at crucial points, the Swedish case also provides a space in which to better understand and critique the discourses and practices of other agencies.

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