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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

NIRAS Sweden AB

Evaluation of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change 2022-2025

Final Report

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**Final Report
August 2025**

Bunafsha Gulakova

Authors: Bunafsha Gulakova

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2025:07

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SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Visiting address: Rissneleden 110, 174 57 Sundbyberg
Postal address: Box 2025, SE-174 02 Sundbyberg, Sweden
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
E-mail: sida@sida.se Web: sida.se/en

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMR	Antimicrobial resistance
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CER	Central Environmental Review
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CT	Core team
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EQ	Evaluation Question
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FESM	Framework for Environmental and Social Management
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gases
GU	Gothenburg University
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HIVOS	Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation
HQ	Headquarters
ILO	International Labor Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
KLIMAT	Sida's Unit for Climate and Environment
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSD	Market Systems Development
MSEK	Million Swedish Krona
MT	Management Team
NbS	Nature-Based Solutions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
PO	Sida Programme Officers
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEI	Stockholm Environment Institute
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
TDR	Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases
TEMA1	Sida's Thematic Unit
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WE4F	Water and Energy for Food
WEXSUS	West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

Preface

This evaluation of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change was commissioned by Sida's unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT), through the Framework Agreement for Evaluations Services with NIRAS Sweden AB. The evaluation was undertaken between April and June 2025 by Bunafsha Gulakova. Quality Assurance was carried out by Graham Haylor.

Executive Summary

The evaluation assessed the Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change over the period 2022–2025, focusing on its relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and adaptiveness. The Helpdesk, operated by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and the University of Gothenburg (GU), is a long-standing mechanism designed to support Sida and its partners with timely, technically sound, and policy-relevant environmental advice.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the Helpdesk's contribution to Sida's objectives and to generate insights that can inform future service design, delivery, and uptake. The findings are intended to support Sida programme officers, decision-makers, and Helpdesk providers in improving environmental integration across Sida's work.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that the Helpdesk remains a vital resource within Sida, especially for programme officers and Embassy staff who lack in-house environmental expertise. Across interviews with 27 key informants and survey responses from 29 individuals (86% of whom had used the Helpdesk during the evaluation period), the service was consistently described as accessible, credible, and timely. The Helpdesk's responsiveness and capacity to translate complex technical issues into actionable advice were repeatedly emphasised.

The Helpdesk's contribution to Sida's operations was particularly strong in areas such as project and programme reviews, thematic analyses, country and regional strategy processes, and providing support by preparing background material and other information for Sida's participation in international negotiations. More than half of survey respondents reported using the Helpdesk for support related to projects and programmes, and nearly 50% for thematic analyses. Examples of effective support include livestock sustainability assessments in Ethiopia, solid waste project evaluations in Ukraine and the Balkans, and support to Sida's engagement in the Green Climate Fund and biodiversity negotiations by e.g. providing project assessments, thematic and policy analyses and reviews.

The Helpdesk also supported environmental integration in civil society and multilateral partnerships. It played a critical role in Sida's assessments of funding applications from major Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) such as Save the Children and Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS), and collaborated with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and International Labor Organisation (ILO) to improve mainstreaming of environmental considerations. However, this aspect of its work could be further strengthened by clearer tracking and institutionalisation of follow-up mechanisms.

Despite the broad recognition of its utility, the Helpdesk's advice is not uniformly applied across Sida. The decentralised structure of Sida means the uptake of guidance varies widely. Feedback systems remain underdeveloped, although a new sample-based follow-up approach introduced in recent years has improved the quality of learning.

The Helpdesk has shown a high degree of adaptiveness. It addressed technical gaps by bringing in external expertise, such as for solid waste management. It has also begun expanding into areas like environmental safeguards in financial instruments, conflict sensitivity, and environmental justice. Nonetheless, the institutionalisation of this work remains limited, and the visibility of the Helpdesk at the embassy level and in cross-thematic areas is uneven.

Conclusions

- The Helpdesk continues to be highly relevant to Sida's work and to emerging needs linked to Sweden's climate aid priorities. Its services are demand-driven, technically credible, and widely appreciated by users.
- It is broadly effective in delivering its outputs, particularly when terms of reference (ToRs) are clearly defined and there is sustained user engagement. However, outcome tracking remains weak, and uptake of outputs is constrained by limited time and capacity among Sida staff.
- The Helpdesk contributes to coherence across sectors, particularly when working with other Helpdesks, but such collaboration remains sporadic. Structured inter-desk cooperation would improve responsiveness in complex contexts and contribute to SDG 16¹.
- The Helpdesk has adapted to new topics, but in order to remain fit for purpose, it must continue to evolve its mandate, expand technical expertise, and improve its internal visibility.

Recommendations

For Sida:

1. **Improve Internal Visibility and Accessibility**

Sida should enhance the visibility of the Helpdesk by upgrading the intranet's navigation, adding dedicated FAQ sections, and sharing Helpdesk updates through internal newsletters. This should target under-engaged staff, especially in embassies and non-environmental sectors. (*Relevance, Effectiveness – Findings 1, 4, 6*)

2. **Promote Cross-Sectoral Uptake of Guidance**

Sida should proactively integrate the Helpdesk's services into sectors such as agriculture, trade, and private sector development. Specific actions include commissioning guidance on environmental safeguards in financial instruments like guarantees and challenge funds. (*Coherence, Adaptiveness – Findings 7, 8*)

¹ Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

3. **Strengthen Monitoring of Uptake and Results**

Sida and the Helpdesk should jointly refine the follow-up system for assignments. Building on the sample-based model, a light monitoring tool should capture use, enabling and limiting factors, and eventual outcomes. This would support internal learning and inform service improvements. *(Effectiveness, Efficiency – Findings 4, 5)*

4. **Expand Sida's Engagement in Waste Management and Other Emerging Issues**

The evaluation recommends that Sida scale up the use of the Helpdesk in technical areas such as waste management, where the Helpdesk has demonstrated effective performance. This is especially relevant for middle-income countries facing growing climate-related waste challenges. *(Relevance, Adaptiveness – Findings 2, 6)*

For the Helpdesk:

1. **Institutionalise Collaboration with Other Helpdesks**

The Helpdesk should formalise inter-desk collaboration through shared task teams and co-authored outputs, particularly with the Conflict and Peace Helpdesk. This would support joined-up responses to environmental fragility and Humanitarian Development Peace (HDP) Nexus challenges. *(Coherence, Adaptiveness – Finding 8)*

2. **Integrate Environmental Justice and Governance**

Building on emerging demand, the Helpdesk should embed principles of environmental justice and inclusive governance into its advisory frameworks. This includes support for SDG 16 and guidance on mediation mechanisms for environmental rights. By including principles such as transparency, fair access to resources, and participation in decision-making, the Helpdesk can support better environmental governance. These elements are especially important in fragile contexts, where weak institutions and conflict over natural resources often go hand in hand. Making environmental advice more connected to these governance issues would improve the Helpdesk's support across Sida's work and help make development efforts more sustainable and inclusive. *(Relevance, Coherence – Finding 8)*

3. **Disseminate Summaries of Completed Assignments**

To promote learning and transparency, the Helpdesk should publish summaries of non-sensitive assignments, highlighting key insights and replicable approaches. *(Effectiveness, Efficiency – Findings 4, 5)*

4. **Maintain a Strong Coordination Core While Scaling Expertise**

As new areas like climate finance, environmental conflict mediation and circular economy gain relevance, the Helpdesk should expand its expert pool while retaining a central coordination team to curate outputs and manage knowledge flows. *(Efficiency, Adaptiveness – Findings 6, 8)*

1 Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by Sida's Unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT). This unit was responsible for managing the evaluation process, approving key deliverables (e.g., inception report and final report), and facilitating interactions between evaluators and primary users. The evaluation aims to assess and enhance the relevance and utility of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change.

The purpose of the evaluation comprised the following:

- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, and usefulness of the Helpdesk's services in supporting Sida staff and partners.
- Determine how well the Helpdesk has adapted to evolving priorities and strategic goals, particularly for effective climate aid.
- Provide actionable recommendations to improve the design, delivery, and scope of the Helpdesk's services.
- Support decision-making on whether and how to continue the Helpdesk's operation in a subsequent phase.

The scope of the evaluation covered the following:

Country	Agency	Period	Sector	SDG	Amount committed
Global	Sida, SLU, GU	2022–25	Environment, Agriculture, Climate	SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land)	12 million SEK/year

1.2 METHODOLOGY

1.2.1 Overall Approach

The evaluation adopted a utilisation-focused approach, in line with the Terms of Reference (ToR), to ensure that findings and recommendations were actionable and directly informed Sida's decision-making processes. This approach was anchored in close interaction with intended users throughout the evaluation process, enabling joint knowledge creation and aligning the evaluation with Sida's strategic priorities. The evaluation also integrated Sida's development perspectives, including human rights, gender equality, conflict sensitivity, and environmental sustainability. Principles of reliability, transparency, stakeholder participation, and ethical responsibility underpinned all phases of the evaluation.

1.2.2 Evaluation Design and Framework

A mixed-methods approach was applied, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The methodology was structured around an evaluation matrix (available in Annex), which linked each evaluation question (EQ) to judgement criteria,

indicators, data sources, and methods. This design supported triangulation and reinforced the robustness of findings.

The evaluation focused on four overarching EQs covering relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and adaptiveness. The sequence of EQs followed a logical order: establishing the necessity and alignment of services (relevance), assessing performance and value (effectiveness), and analysing fit with Sida's evolving policy context (coherence and adaptiveness).

1.2.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was undertaken between April and May 2025. The data collection was designed to ensure balanced representation and to triangulate findings across different institutional roles and user experiences. This mixed-methods evidence base supports a nuanced assessment of the Helpdesk's relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and adaptiveness. Below is a summary of the data collection methods applied.

Document Review: Analysis was undertaken of Helpdesk service logs, Sida's environmental management systems, policies, prior evaluations (e.g., NIRAS 2021, Bjerninger 2015), and other internal reporting to understand the strategic context, responsiveness, and thematic alignment of Helpdesk services.

Theory of Change Analysis: An implicit ToC was reconstructed and tested through data collection, assessing whether enhanced access to environmental expertise contributed to greater environmental integration in Sida's operations.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Primary data were collected through KIIs with 27 individuals (20 women, 7 men). Interviewees were selected from diverse stakeholder groups, including Sida programme managers, policy advisers, Embassy staff, Helpdesk team members, partner organisations, and external experts. Two respondents (one man and one woman) contributed written responses due to scheduling constraints. Participants were purposively selected to ensure a balance of institutional roles and perspectives.

Survey: An online survey gathered structured feedback from 29 respondents, 26 of whom had used the Helpdesk during 2022–2025. Respondents rated effectiveness and accessibility and gave open-ended feedback on improvements and gaps (21 qualitative feedback responses) which provided additional data and insights on accessibility, technical competence, and timeliness.

Case Illustrations: Used to explore adaptive performance, including support to waste management in Ukraine and livestock sustainability in Ethiopia. While not full case studies, these examples were drawn from documented assignments and stakeholder feedback.

Triangulation: Triangulation was applied through comparison of diverse sources, methods, and perspectives, including between documents, KIIs, and survey data. Triangulation was also applied across roles (HQ/embassy), modalities (advisory/review), and perspectives (users/providers).

Representation and validity: The purposive sampling ensured representation across Sida roles (HQ, embassy), sectors, and genders. While not statistically generalisable, the sample size was sufficient to identify recurring patterns and draw evidence-based conclusions. Source credibility and perspective independence were assessed to minimise bias. The use of diverse methods and iterative validation supported the reliability of findings.

Gender equality and human rights perspectives: The evaluation applied a gender-responsive and human rights-based lens throughout. Gender equality was considered through respondent balance, intersectional analysis of survey and interview content, and review of Helpdesk advice on gender-sensitive environmental programming. Human rights principles (participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, legality) guided the framing of questions and analysis of Helpdesk contributions to rights-based development.

Ethical Considerations: The evaluation respected informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Interviewees were informed about the purpose, scope, and intended use of the evaluation. Data was anonymised where appropriate to protect identities and foster open dialogue.

1.2.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and open survey responses were coded thematically using a matrix aligned with the evaluation questions. Quantitative survey responses were summarised descriptively. Contribution analysis was used selectively to assess the extent to which Helpdesk services plausibly influenced outcomes such as improved environmental integration. Findings were compared across data types and stakeholder groups to identify consistencies, contradictions, and emergent themes.

1.2.5 Challenges, Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The evaluation team identified the following methodological limitations and applied mitigation measures:

- **Remote-only data collection** limited observational insights. *Mitigation:* Triangulated across KIIs, documents, and surveys.
- **Informal adaptations undocumented.** *Mitigation:* Explored through probing questions and user narratives.
- **Variability in stakeholder recall and interpretation.** *Mitigation:* Follow-up clarification and pattern verification across sources.
- **Sampling bias risk.** *Mitigation:* Purposeful selection and wide-ranging outreach to balance views.
- **Technological and logistical barriers.** *Mitigation:* Flexible modes (e.g., WhatsApp, phone) and asynchronous participation enabled inclusivity.

2 The Evaluated Intervention

2.1 SIDA'S HELPDESK FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Established through a collaboration between the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), and the University of Gothenburg's West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development (Wexus), the Helpdesk serves as a resource for Sida and its embassies. The Helpdesk is set up to provide service delivery, and operational support to ensure environmental considerations remain central to development efforts. The services include project-based environmental integration, for instance, in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and regional programmes, finance and learning-oriented assignments.

The revisions of the Administrative Manual of the Helpdesk indicate that this organisation was established to support Sida staff and their partners. The Helpdesk operates under a management structure to ensure effective delivery of services. The organisational framework comprises a Management Team (MT) and a Core Team (CT), each with specific roles that facilitate the Helpdesk's functions. The MT, which includes the Team Leader (TL) and the Quality Manager (QM), are responsible for strategic planning, quality assurance, and the alignment of activities with overarching goals. Regular meetings, both internally and with Sida, take place.

The helpdesk provides a range of services, such as undertaking Environmental Reviews on CSOs, or Central Environmental Reviews on Multilateral organisations, supporting Sida to appraise the partner's capacity, systems and policies related to environment, and other capacity-building initiatives, tailored to environmental considerations in development projects. The Helpdesk maintains an active online presence via its website. It operates under legal frameworks to manage agreements with Sida and other partners effectively. These agreements outline the responsibilities and expectations of all parties involved.

2.2. THEORY OF CHANGE ANALYSIS

The evaluation assessed whether the Helpdesk's services to Sida staff and partners contributed meaningfully to improved environmental and climate integration in Sida's programming, policy development, and implementation. Although a formal Theory of Change (ToC) was not defined at the outset of the Helpdesk's current cycle, the evaluation reconstructed an implicit ToC based on documentary analysis, stakeholder interviews, and observed patterns of service delivery and use.

The reconstructed ToC assumes that if Sida staff and partners have timely and easy access to high-quality, contextually appropriate environmental expertise via the

Helpdesk, they are more likely to apply this knowledge in project design, implementation, and monitoring. This should lead to a more consistent integration of environmental and climate perspectives, stronger alignment with Sida's environment and climate management system, and, ultimately, more sustainable and risk-informed development outcomes.

Box 1: Reconstructed Theory of Change

This causal pathway was largely validated by the evidence collected. The Helpdesk

If Sida improves access to environmental expertise, **then** the integration of environmental considerations in its operations will be strengthened, **because** increased expertise enhances knowledge, decision-making, and implementation capacity, leading to more effective and sustainable environmental interventions.

consistently delivered technically sound and tailored advice that supported Sida staff at both headquarters and embassies, particularly during project appraisal and strategic planning phases. Its accessibility, responsiveness, and ability to simplify complex environmental concepts were repeatedly cited as strengths. Examples included guidance on livestock systems in Ethiopia, support to Sida's inputs in global environmental negotiations, and detailed risk assessments of solid waste interventions in Ukraine and the Balkans.

However, the evaluation also found that the pathway from technical support to improved integration is influenced by several mediating factors. These include Sida's decentralised structure, which limits uniform uptake of advice across units; variations in staff capacity and familiarity with environmental requirements; and the absence of systematic tracking mechanisms to monitor how Helpdesk advice is applied in practice. Furthermore, while the Helpdesk has adapted to new thematic demands—such as integrating environmental safeguards in financial instruments, ambition not only to reduce environmental and climate-related risks, but also to actively pursue opportunities that contribute to nature-positive outcomes and collaborating on conflict-environment linkages—its visibility and uptake remain uneven, especially at the embassy level.

Thus, while the Helpdesk's contribution to strengthening environmental integration is evident, its full potential is contingent on both institutional enablers (such as internal promotion and cross-thematic collaboration) and the ability of Sida staff to operationalise the advice provided.

2.2 TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS

The primary users of this evaluation are Sida staff, who are directly involved in the management and operationalisation of the Helpdesk. This includes Programme Managers at the Unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT), who supervise the Helpdesk's contributions to Sida's climate and environmental objectives, and Policy

Advisers at the Thematic Unit for Environment and Climate (TEMA1), who make regular use of Helpdesk services in both strategic planning and day-to-day operations.

Additional stakeholders include Embassy staff, who draw on Helpdesk advice to mainstream climate and environmental considerations into country-level programming; partner organisations approved by Sida to receive Helpdesk support for coaching and capacity development; and the Helpdesk Core Team, composed of environmental experts from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and the University of Gothenburg (GU), who deliver the services. External experts are also contracted as needed to provide specialised technical inputs. Finally, the wider public—including taxpayers, the international community, youth organisations, civil society actors, and academic institutions concerned with environmental sustainability—represent indirect beneficiaries of the Helpdesk’s support of Swedish development cooperation.

3 Findings

3.1 RELEVANCE

EQ1: To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk services provided Sida and Embassy staff and partners with relevant, comprehensible, and timely support in accordance with the ToR for helpdesk services?

Finding 1. The evaluation finds that during the cycle covered by the evaluation, Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change played a crucial role in supporting Swedish development cooperation by providing relevant, demand-driven technical assistance; conducting timely assessments; and facilitating comprehensive environmental integration across various projects and programs.

Respondents elaborated that Sida expects all interventions to reflect five core perspectives: poverty, democracy and human rights, environment and climate, and conflict. The Helpdesk plays a **central role in ensuring the environmental and climate perspective is appropriately addressed** when Sida staff lack in-house expertise.

The interviewed Sida and Embassy staff affirmed that the Helpdesk's contributions spanned multiple service categories, including programme and project support, country and regional strategy processes, international processes, thematic analyses, methodological development, capacity development, information dissemination, facilitation, and learning. In this regard, the Helpdesk plays an essential role in supporting Sida's program officers, particularly during project appraisals, by helping integrate environmental concerns across sectors. It is used both for high-level strategic advice (e.g., during strategy development) and more technical, project-specific inputs.

The same group of informants and external partners shared that communication with the Helpdesk was clear, timely, and efficient, with no delays experienced. Reports were well-structured, comprehensive, and tailored to the specific needs of the application review process. *The informants explained that the working process with the Helpdesk was "smooth, and the team understood what we needed without us having to over-explain."*

The Helpdesk services included reviews of project proposals, development of results frameworks, guidance on sector practices such as livestock production, and help with interpreting Sida's environmental assessment requirements. The Helpdesk was able to **communicate technical concepts in an accessible way** and offer science-based clarifications. For example, **in the case of a livestock programme in Ethiopia**, the Helpdesk helped **clarify** that the environmental impact depended on how, rather than whether such **farming was done**. Respondents stated that the Helpdesk **remained within its role as a technical advisor** and did **not interfere** with internal decision-making.

In terms of efficiency, the Helpdesk is valued for its flexible contracting mechanism, which allows Sida staff to request services without the delays and administrative burdens of standard procurement. The Helpdesk's proactive engagement—such as initiating informal check-ins or scouting for areas where their support might be useful—was viewed positively and contributed to the perception of it being pro-active, responsive and pragmatic. Another example of swift reaction is the **support during a locust outbreak**, where the Helpdesk contributed to Sida's response by providing timely and relevant information and analysis.

Examples cited include a **training in Jerusalem** on Sida's environmental assessment system and a **regional workshop on Green Transition in Amman**. Staff confirmed that the **Helpdesk generally responds quickly to requests, sometimes within hours**, and that collaboration throughout the assignment ensures relevance and accuracy. It was emphasised that the quality and timeliness of support often depend on how clearly the initial request is formulated.

While **detailed ToRs can help improve the scope and depth of services**, the Helpdesk's familiarity with Sida procedures allows for flexible, ongoing dialogue, reducing the need for overly formalised ToRs in all cases.

A delay was reported in only one case, when Sida requested highly specialised expertise in heavy waste management—a niche area requiring careful identification of the right expert. The Helpdesk needed additional time to secure the appropriate technical profile. However, once the expert was contracted, no further delays occurred. Moreover, the procured expert's services proved highly valuable and were subsequently leveraged across multiple countries, enhancing the overall efficiency and impact of the Helpdesk's support. The notable contributions of the Helpdesk in this demanding field are listed hereunder:

- **Support to the Lutsk Solid Waste Project (Ukraine)** – Advising on an integrated waste management approach instead of a mechanical biological treatment plant.
- **Mozambique Off-Grid Electrification Accelerator +SOL** – Ensuring that environmental risks were adequately considered in the project design.
- **Serbia and Moldova Solid Waste Programmes** – Identifying key risks and recommending a phased approach to ensure sustainable implementation.

The Helpdesk is considered a dependable and knowledgeable partner in technical matters like Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), it contributed to Sida's internal capacity-building through “roadshows”—in-person information and training sessions held across Sida field offices. In one instance, a respondent explained that there is variation in the quality of services depending on the country context and the experience of the Helpdesk staff involved. In cases where Helpdesk consultants were unfamiliar with the national context (e.g., Liberia), the relevance and accuracy of their inputs could be limited. Conversely, when staff had prior field experience in a particular country or region, their advice was significantly more precise and actionable.

EQ2: To what extent has the helpdesk provided relevant support for staff and partners to deliver enhanced integration in line with the requirements in Sida's environment and management system?

Finding 2. The Helpdesk was used not only for assessment, but also to guide internal planning and staff awareness. Respondents confirmed that Helpdesk advice was consistent with Sida’s management system and three-part approach to environmental integration.

All Sida-supported operations are required to be grounded in, and guided by, an environmental and climate change perspective. This requirement is embedded in Sida’s Climate and Environment Policy, which mandates the systematic integration of environmental considerations across all sectors and interventions. Environmental assessment is a core component of this approach and is obligatory for all Sida-funded initiatives. It is structured around three pillars: (i) enhancing opportunities for positive impacts on the environment, climate, and biodiversity; (ii) avoiding, reducing, and managing risks of negative environmental and climate impacts; and (iii) identifying and managing risks posed by climate change or environmental degradation to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the contribution.

In this regard, the Helpdesk remains highly relevant to Sida’s institutional needs and future priorities. Stakeholder feedback, particularly from senior staff, highlighted that the service is considered essential—rated “almost a 10 out of 10” in terms of necessity. This strong perceived relevance stems from several factors: the increasing number of new staff unfamiliar with environmental integration, Sida’s evolving development priorities, and the continued global urgency of addressing environmental and climate challenges. Even in the context of internal reforms or shifting political priorities, the demand for timely, high-quality environmental and climate expertise remains constant, underscoring the enduring strategic value of the Helpdesk.

According to the survey results, 86% of respondents (25 out of 29) confirmed that they had requested services or used the Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change between 2022 and 2025. This high engagement rate reflects the strong operational relevance of the Helpdesk and its integration into the day-to-day work of Sida staff, both at headquarters and in the field.

Only 14% of respondents reported not using the Helpdesk, which may point to **gaps in awareness** or to areas where further promotion and accessibility could be improved. These insights also align with qualitative feedback gathered through interviews, in which the Helpdesk was described as a valued and trusted resource for addressing both technical and strategic needs in environmental integration. This finding confirms that the Helpdesk is not a marginal service but a core part of Sida’s environmental support architecture.

A total of **25 respondents** confirmed having used the Helpdesk during 2022–2025, indicating its continued relevance to Sida staff and stakeholders.²

² Source: Evaluation survey summary.

One organisation reported using Helpdesk support to translate findings from an **environmental assessment into a structured results framework aligned with Sida's expectations**. This included identifying **concrete steps to avoid environmental harm and improve positive outcomes**. Another respondent noted that the Helpdesk provided input on how to assess practices proposed by partners, especially in areas where the organisation lacked its own expertise. In practice, this **helped the organisation clarify what types of interventions were environmentally acceptable and what conditions should be met**.

Finding 3. The Helpdesk made valuable contributions to Sida's civil society programming, offering expertise that supported environmental integration within partner organisations and project design.

Based on the 2023 Annual Assignment Summary from Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, several assignments involved collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs). These requests aimed to integrate environmental and climate considerations into various programs and initiatives. In 2023, Sida's Helpdesk actively collaborated with various CSOs to embed environmental and climate change perspectives into their strategic and operational frameworks. These collaborations underscored the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into diverse areas such as human rights, women's empowerment, and health. The Helpdesk's support ranged from strategic plan reviews to capacity-building initiatives, reflecting a comprehensive approach to environmental integration in civil society programming.

"We don't have enough resources in-house to do these deep environmental assessments. The Helpdesk fills that gap." Testimony from a Sida's partner

According to the interviewed partners, the Helpdesk plays a **critical role in Sida's assessment of civil society funding applications**, particularly for large international NGOs like Save the Children. The Helpdesk's input helped validate and guide the environmental and climate integration of partner organisations. This was especially important in assessing applications where internal Sida capacity was insufficient for a deep technical review. The Helpdesk conducted a Save the Children Environmental Integration Review, which resulted in:³

- Clear identification of risks and opportunities.
- Adequate monitoring frameworks in place.
- Varied levels of implementation capacity among country offices.
- Recommended to enhance the practical application of environmental integration.

In 2023, the Helpdesk supported at least six such organisations across multiple regions and thematic areas, offering tailored guidance to ensure environmental and climate considerations were meaningfully integrated into programme design and

³ Source: Helpdesk reports and KIs with partners.

implementation.⁴ For example, the Helpdesk provided inputs to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Mali to enhance the environmental sustainability of youth employment interventions. Similarly, it supported the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the Democratic Republic of Congo to reinforce environmental assessments and adopt a more strategic approach to climate adaptation. In the African regional context, the Helpdesk contributed to Sida's engagement in the Team Europe Initiative on transboundary water governance.

Box 22: Helpdesk Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations⁵: (2023)

- **HIVOS Regional SRHR Fund – Africa (2023-004):** The Helpdesk reviewed the phase II proposal of HIVOS's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Fund. While HIVOS demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, the Helpdesk recommended enhancing the integration of environmental aspects into the results framework, budget, and monitoring and evaluation plans.
- **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (2023-042):** The Helpdesk provided input on APWLD's strategic plan, focusing on strengthening the incorporation of environmental and climate change perspectives into their advocacy and programmatic work.
- **Kvinna till Kvinna Dialogue Support (2023-064):** Assistance was provided to Kvinna till Kvinna in integrating environmental considerations into their dialogue and support mechanisms, emphasising the intersection of environmental issues with women's rights and peacebuilding efforts.
- **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Strategic Plan Review (2023-067):** The Helpdesk reviewed FIDH's strategic plan, advising on the inclusion of environmental and climate change aspects to enhance the organisation's human rights advocacy in the context of environmental justice.
- **ForumCiv Coaching (2023-028):** The Helpdesk offered coaching to ForumCiv, focusing on building capacity to integrate environmental and climate change considerations into their civil society support programs.

Several UN agencies, such as World Health Organisation (WHO)/the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Bangladesh, were also positively assessed by the Helpdesk for effectively integrating environmental dimensions in their programming. These contributions demonstrate the Helpdesk's growing relevance in supporting multilaterally executed initiatives, especially in complex sectors like public health, food systems, and natural resource governance.

Case Study: Sida has a long-standing engagement with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and supports FAO's work at global, regional, and country levels. Sida commissioned the Helpdesk to undertake a Central Environmental Review (CER) of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In this regard, the Helpdesk provided targeted technical support to Sida

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change. Annual Assignment Summary 2023.

through the preparation of the *Central Environmental Review of FAO*, which served to deepen Sida's understanding of FAO's institutional systems, policies, and capacities for environmental and climate integration.

The review identified significant progress since the 2019 assessment, notably FAO's adoption of the Strategic Framework 2020–2031 and the establishment of the new Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM). It confirmed that FAO's central structures increasingly reflect Sida's three-pronged approach to environmental integration—maximising positive impacts, managing risks, and enhancing climate resilience.

The Helpdesk's review also highlighted gaps, such as the need for stronger environmental performance monitoring and clearer articulation of environmental objectives in programming. The review included **eight** specific recommendations to Sida for its dialogue with FAO.⁶

These recommendations address issues such as climate strategy implementation, development of indicators, co-learning on mainstreaming, Greenhouse gases (GHG) emission reduction, Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM)⁷ rollout, integration in emergency support, FAO's normative role, and stakeholder facilitation.

3.2 EFFECTIVENESS

EQ3: How do Sida and Embassy staff perceive the relevance, effectiveness, quality, usefulness, and accessibility of the Environment and Climate Helpdesk services?

Finding 4. Users consistently described the Helpdesk as accessible, technically strong, and responsive to their needs. Reports were considered timely, well-reasoned, and valuable for decision-making. However, outcome tracking remains a challenge, particularly when evaluating the long-term utility of specific assignments.

Helpdesk services were described as easy to access, and Sida staff appreciated that they did not need to go through lengthy procurement processes. The fact that the Helpdesk is based in academic institutions was seen as a strength, offering technical credibility. Sida staff emphasised the high technical quality and independence of the Helpdesk's work. According to one senior respondent, the Helpdesk's assessments offered a degree of objectivity and quality control that Sida could not achieve on its own. Its **role as a second opinion** was seen as strengthening internal assessments and building confidence in decision-making. A strong majority of survey respondents who used the

⁶ Ibid at Section 6.2 and in Annex 10. III. Recommendations for Sida's internal consideration

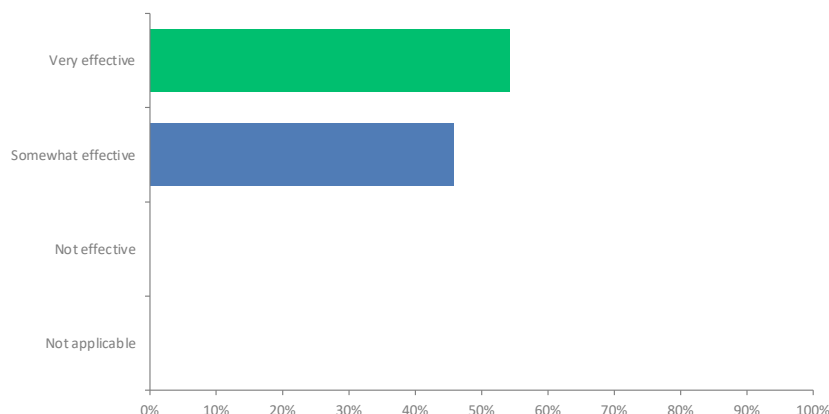
⁷ A structured system of policies, procedures, tools, and safeguards designed to ensure that environmental and social considerations are effectively integrated into funded programmes and projects.

Sida Environment and Climate Helpdesk between 2022 and 2025 rated its support as "Very effective".⁸ This indicates a broadly positive perception of the Helpdesk's utility in contributing to intended outputs.

Figure 1: Effectiveness of Helpdesk Support

Q14: Did you find the helpdesk support effective in relation to the intended output?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 5



Reports were consistently described as professional, well-reasoned, and helpful. The Helpdesk provided substantial support across various Sida departments and embassies. Interviewees cited multiple examples of effective support, including technical inputs on antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and emergency response work (e.g. desert locust outbreaks). These tasks were handled by core experts or facilitated through access to broader academic networks via the universities hosting the Helpdesk. The ability to draw on specialised academic expertise within the universities was seen as a major strength, especially in highly technical areas such as AMR or locust management.

While overall feedback on the Helpdesk's effectiveness was positive, internal reporting showed a 19% decrease in the number of requests between January and June 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.⁹ This decline was linked to Sida's internal budget cuts and a reorientation away from thematic reviews toward more direct implementation activities. These contextual changes, rather than any perceived drop in quality, explain the temporary reduction in demand during the mentioned period.

Most survey respondents reported seeking support for **Projects and Programmes** and **Thematic Analyses**, reflecting the Helpdesk's central role in mainstreaming environmental considerations in Sida's operational work.¹⁰ Inquiries related to **country, regional, and thematic strategy** also featured prominently, reinforcing the

⁸ Outcome of the evaluation survey

⁹ Source: Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, "Semi-Annual Activity Report: January – June 2022, << last assessed May 2025>>"

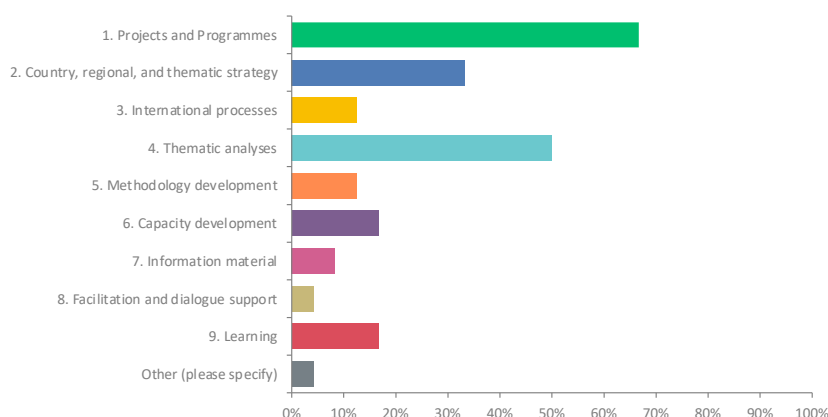
¹⁰ Source: Outcome of the evaluation survey.

Helpdesk's contribution to upstream planning. Lower - but still meaningful demand was recorded for areas such as **methodology development**, **capacity building**, **information material**, and **facilitation**. These findings confirm that the Helpdesk has broad utility across the programming cycle, though its strategic communication and visibility could be strengthened in lesser-used service areas.

Figure 2: Types of Inquiries Made to the Helpdesk

Q3: What types of inquiries have you made to the Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 24 Skipped: 5



Finding 5. Despite the Helpdesk's high-quality inputs, their uptake across Sida is inconsistent. This is primarily due to Sida's decentralised structure, which limits the uniform application of policy advice. Systematic tracking of implementation remains difficult, with current follow-up mechanisms constrained by mandate and capacity.

The decentralised nature of Sida and Swedish embassies autonomous government agencies status, often limits the dissemination and application of policy-level advice beyond Sida HQ. Despite their ability to draw on substantial academic and applied expertise, the Helpdesk's inputs are not always utilised to their full potential. **Many respondents acknowledged that tracking the outcomes of Helpdesk support has been a persistent challenge.** An earlier system, which automatically sent feedback requests to Sida staff after each assignment, had a low response rate and was biased—positive experiences were more likely to be reported. The short timeframe (just weeks after delivery) also did not allow time to assess longer-term utility.

To improve the situation, a new practice was introduced whereby the Helpdesk would follow up on a sample of assignments (about 15–20%) in more depth and after a more meaningful period had elapsed. This approach yielded better-quality feedback, including critical observations, and allowed the Helpdesk to understand how their input was used. The Sida staff stated that there was a general trust in the Helpdesk's transparency and openness in collecting and presenting this feedback. However, more could be done to systematically follow up on the implementation or influence of the

Helpdesk's recommendations, though they recognised that such monitoring falls beyond their mandate and is constrained by time and procurement limits.

Finding 6: Sida's Capacity Constraints Limit Use of Helpdesk Outputs

Although the Helpdesk provides Sida with relevant and timely support, Sida staff often do not have the time or capacity to fully engage with the reports and recommendations produced. Programme Officers are typically focused on managing ongoing projects, and while they value the Helpdesk's input, they rarely have time to read full reports, especially if they are not directly responsible for the Helpdesk's oversight. As a result, the use of Helpdesk outputs across Sida varies and is sometimes limited.

3.3 COHERENCE & ADAPTIVENESS

EQ4: To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk shown adaptiveness? Is the helpdesk fit to deliver on the new requirements for Swedish development cooperation, especially the goal of increased and effective climate aid?

Finding 7. The Helpdesk is regarded as strategically relevant and capable of supporting Sweden's evolving climate aid priorities, particularly in areas such as global environmental negotiations and cross-sectoral technical input. Its continued fitness for purpose, however, depends on adapting its mandate and visibility to meet future programming needs—especially through deeper collaboration, enhanced outreach, and expanded capacity in emerging fields such as financial instruments and environmental justice.

The Helpdesk has shown the ability to adapt to different contexts, user needs and with evolving Swedish development priorities, including effective climate aid. Helpdesk was able to address own limitations in technical expertise areas, such as solid waste management, noting that in such cases the Helpdesk has effectively subcontracted external experts, including in recent work related to Albania and broader policy discussions with EBRD.

However, recent shifts in Sweden's aid priorities and administrative structure have reduced the demand for support. As a result, some Sida staff and their partners have not used the Helpdesk in the past two years, not due to any shortcomings of the service itself, but as a result of broader shifts in the development cooperation landscape.

Despite this, respondents believe the Helpdesk remains fit-for-purpose and leveraged Sida's effort on a global level. For example, the Helpdesk provided **technical input to global climate and environmental negotiations and policy discussions**, including:

- **Green Climate Fund (GCF) Board Meetings** – Reviewing multiple funding proposals for climate adaptation and mitigation projects in **Africa, Asia, and Latin America**.
- **Preparation for CBD COP16 (UN Biodiversity Summit)** – Supporting Sida's delegation with background materials and strategic inputs.

- **Review of EU Green Deal Regulations** – Assessing potential impacts on Sida’s work in different regions and sectors.

It was considered particularly valuable for civil society organisations working in humanitarian or rights-based sectors, where internal environmental capacity is limited. Some concern was raised about the future of the Helpdesk under the new aid model. One partner stated that **losing the Helpdesk would undermine scientific oversight and reduce the quality of climate-related support.**

A recommendation was made to Sida to preserve and better promote the Helpdesk and to consider giving it a clearer role in supporting collaboration, learning, and dialogue across sectors. The respondents provided that in order for the Helpdesk deliver on the new requirements, the following emerging areas should be considered:

- The **visibility of the Helpdesk within Sida**, particularly at the embassy level, is limited. One interviewee noted that Sida’s intranet does not clearly communicate the availability or functions of the Helpdesk.
- There is potential for the Helpdesk to contribute to **cross-cutting issues**, such as integrating environmental safeguards into financial instruments like guarantees and challenge funds. A recommendation was made for Sida to commission a Guidance Paper on environmental requirements for these instruments.
- The Helpdesk could expand its **cross-sectoral engagement**, including collaboration with other helpdesks (e.g., on conflict, peace, or market development), especially in areas like deforestation regulations or land use with potential environmental justice implications.

The Helpdesk supported **environmental portfolio analyses and strategic planning** for Sida’s regional and thematic strategies. Notable achievements include:

- **Environmental Portfolio Analysis for MENA, Asia, and Palestine** – Assessing the level of environmental integration in Sida’s ongoing contributions, identifying gaps, and recommending improvements.
- **Mapping Environmental and Climate Actors in Africa** – Identifying organisations that could support climate readiness efforts.
- **Donor Mapping for Bangladesh** – Analysing donor presence in the environmental sector to identify potential gaps in funding.

Finding 8. The Helpdesk has the potential to expand its impact by sharing climate and environment knowledge across a broader range of Sida sectors, not only with traditional environmental stakeholders.

Respondents highlighted that climate-related risks and regulatory developments—such as the EU Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains—affect sectors beyond the environment, including agriculture, trade, finance, and rights-based programming. Targeted guidance from the Helpdesk could help ensure that Sida’s support in these areas incorporates appropriate environmental safeguards. In the respondent’s opinion, this approach would promote more consistent integration of climate and environmental considerations across the full spectrum of Sida’s development cooperation.

For instance, Sida’s market development network would benefit from updates and guidance on topics such as the EU Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains. These regulatory developments are not limited to environmental programming but are increasingly relevant across sectors including trade, agriculture, and finance.

A specific suggestion was made to commission the Helpdesk to produce guidance on environmental safeguards for Sida’s financial instruments, such as guarantees and challenge funds.¹¹ These instruments are used to enable partner organisations to access finance or implement innovative solutions. While some environmental risks—such as large-scale monoculture projects that displace indigenous communities—are clearly identifiable, others are more subtle.¹² The proposed guidance would help Sida define minimum environmental standards or screening criteria to apply when engaging implementing partners in these financing mechanisms. This would strengthen coherence between Sida’s climate objectives and its broader portfolio, ensuring that environmental risks are systematically addressed in non-environmental sectors as well.

Finding 9. The Helpdesk has demonstrated a growing capacity for cross-thematic collaboration, contributing to more integrated and policy-relevant support during Sida’s strategy cycle. By working with other Helpdesks - particularly on conflict, gender, and migration - the Environment and Climate Helpdesk has helped reduce thematic silos and support more coherent, multi-dimensional responses to complex development challenges. However, such collaboration remains occasional and would benefit from further institutionalisation.

Collaboration between Sida’s thematic Helpdesks has demonstrably sharpened the effectiveness of its environmental services in three interlocking ways: by broadening analytical scope, enhancing operational coherence, and accelerating knowledge transfer.

For example, joint assignments have expanded the analytical reach of the Environment and Climate Change Helpdesk beyond traditional “green” parameters. Most recent cross-desk work with the Peace, Human Security and Humanitarian Assistance Helpdesk—such as the 2024 mapping of 58 contributions on “Climate, Peace and Security in Africa”—brought conflict-sensitivity lenses into environmental portfolio design, enabling Sida to identify leverage points where climate action also mitigates fragility risks.

According to respondents, the Helpdesk worked together with Sida’s Human Security Helpdesk on a joint assignment looking at how climate, environment, conflict, and peace are connected in the MENA region. It was Sida’s first experience of two helpdesks working on the same task. While the cooperation was successful and the final report well received, it took more time than usual because both teams had to agree on the task, combine their inputs, and review the work together. Despite this, the teams

¹¹ Source: evaluation’s KII.

¹² Ibid.

found they had a shared understanding of the issues and worked well together. This demonstrates that the Helpdesk is able to work flexibly with others and contribute to broader topics beyond its usual focus.

Similarly, a Burkina Faso conflict analysis explicitly required the Human Security Helpdesk to examine linkages between climate change, land-resource access and gendered conflict dynamics—a mandate that would have been missed without inter-desk coordination.¹³ These integrative mandates have led to more nuanced environmental assessments that address root causes of instability rather than treating environmental degradation in isolation.

Some informants stated that thanks to Helpdesk’s efforts, the collaboration has improved policy coherence across Sida’s thematic strategies. The Environment Helpdesk now frames its advice around the “planetary boundaries” principle and explicitly calls for synergies with all thematic areas.¹⁴ The other example offered is the dedicated knowledge product “Linkages between Conflict, Environment and Climate Change”, prepared jointly with peace specialists, which translates this principle into operational guidance for country teams, showing how natural-resource governance reforms can simultaneously reduce conflict risks and strengthen environmental outcomes.¹⁵ By embedding such cross-cutting analyses in Sida’s strategy cycle, the Helpdesks have reduced thematic silos and helped country offices reconcile climate objectives with peacebuilding, gender and migration goals.

Working together across Helpdesks has made the services faster and more useful. Sida staff note that the setup, where universities like the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the University of Gothenburg lead the Environment Helpdesk, and experts from other Helpdesks support specific tasks, has worked well. For example, when the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) departments needed an environmental-conflict data compilation on short notice, the Environment Helpdesk drew on the Peace Helpdesk’s regional contacts to meet the deadline, demonstrating the efficiency gains of shared networks and templates.

Taken together, these developments showed that structured collaboration among Sida’s Helpdesks has moved environmental support from a stand-alone technical service toward an integrated, risk-informed and policy-coherent advisory function. The resulting services are better aligned with Sida’s climate-finance scale-up and its Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus commitments, while remaining responsive to country-level demands.

¹³ See: Guidance on Conflict Analysis – A Technical Note. 2023

¹⁴ Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, “Why Environment and Climate Change Matter in Development Cooperation,” accessed May 31, 2025, <https://sidaenvironmenthelpdesk.se/en/why-environment>.

¹⁵ Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, “Linkages Between Conflict, Environment and Climate Change,” accessed May 31, 2025, <https://sidaenvironmenthelpdesk.se/en/linkages-between-conflict-environment-and-climate-change>.

Despite these gains, cross-desk collaboration remains largely *ad hoc*. Evaluation survey results indicate that while the majority of users who engaged the Helpdesk on conflict-related matters found its guidance appropriate—33% rated it as “well” and 12.5% as “very well”—this aspect of the Helpdesk’s work remains underutilised or not widely known. Half of the respondents (50%) marked this question as “not applicable”, suggesting that many Sida staff or partners either do not associate the Helpdesk with conflict-sensitive advice or have not yet required such support.

The evaluation finds that more deliberate investment in joint planning, shared task teams, and co-authored deliverables would strengthen the Helpdesk’s contribution to Sida’s evolving priorities, including the scale-up of climate finance and implementation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. A more structured approach could also ensure that the Helpdesk’s advisory function is used to its full potential across Sida’s programming and policy cycles.

Crucially, such collaboration could advance not only SDG 13 (Climate Action)¹⁶ and SDG 15 (Life on Land)¹⁷ but also SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)¹⁸. By embedding principles of environmental governance—such as transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making - into cross-thematic advisory work, the Helpdesk can help strengthen institutional responses to climate and environmental challenges in fragile contexts. This would position the Helpdesk as a driver of governance-informed environmental programming, aligned with Sida’s commitments to rights-based, conflict-sensitive development cooperation.

¹⁶ Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

¹⁷ Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal15>

¹⁸ Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

4 Evaluative Conclusions

4.1 RELEVANCE

Sida's Environment and Climate Helpdesk continues to play an important and practical role in supporting development work. It provides clear, useful, and timely advice to Sida staff and partners, especially when internal expertise on environmental or climate issues is limited. The Helpdesk has helped staff understand and apply Sida's environmental requirements, both in planning new projects and reviewing funding proposals.

Its services are easy to access, flexible, and well suited to the needs of different teams, including embassies and civil society partners. Staff consistently described the advice as helpful, well explained, and often quickly delivered—even in urgent or complex situations. The Helpdesk's ability to explain technical issues in simple terms has made it especially valuable for Programme Officers lacking a strong background in environmental matters.

The Helpdesk has also contributed to Sida's broader work by integrating environmental perspectives across different dimensions of its engagement, such as civil society support, humanitarian aid, and regional strategies. This makes it not only relevant but also adaptable to new priorities and challenges. Overall, the Helpdesk remains a trusted and needed resource for integrating environment and climate concerns into Sida's work.

4.2 EFFECTIVENESS

Sida and Embassy staff generally view the Environment and Climate Helpdesk as a valuable and effective service. It is widely seen as easy to access, technically strong, and responsive to the needs of different teams. The reports produced are timely, well-structured, and useful for both planning and decision-making. The ability to draw on academic expertise adds credibility and depth to the advice provided.

However, while the Helpdesk is well regarded, the actual use of its outputs is uneven. This is partly because the Helpdesk provides demand-driven services. Also, due to Sida's decentralised structure, different units and embassies apply the advice in different ways, with no common system to track how the recommendations are used. Past efforts to gather feedback were limited in scope and timing, which made it difficult to understand the long-term value of the Helpdesk's support. A newer follow-up method is improving these efforts, but more could be done to understand how the advice translates into action.

Another limiting factor is staff capacity. Even when reports are highly relevant, Sida Programme Officers often lack the time to review and apply them fully—especially

when their primary focus is managing existing projects. As a result, the Helpdesk's impact depends not only on the quality of its advice, but also on the time and capacity of Sida staff to make use of it. In short, the Helpdesk is performing well in delivering high-quality support, but its overall effectiveness is shaped by internal constraints at Sida—particularly in follow-up and in the ability of staff to act on the advice provided.

4.3 COHERENCE & ADAPTIVENESS

The Environment and Climate Helpdesk has proven a strong ability to adapt to Sida's evolving development priorities, maintaining its strategic relevance even as internal structures and external demands have shifted. It has remained responsive to emerging needs, including growing attention to environmental safeguards in financial instruments and increasing interest in environmental justice. By drawing on academic and external expertise, the Helpdesk has addressed gaps in technical capacity—such as solid waste management—and provided timely, policy-relevant support across a broad range of sectors and contexts.

The Helpdesk has also made progress in strengthening coherence across Sida's work. Through collaboration with other thematic Helpdesks, it has supported integrated responses that link climate and environmental issues with peacebuilding, gender, migration, and conflict sensitivity. These efforts have helped reduce thematic silos and encouraged a more joined-up approach to strategy development and programming. However, such collaboration remains ad hoc and would benefit from stronger institutional support.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the Helpdesk's value in cross-sectoral work and global negotiations, but noted that its visibility—particularly at the embassy level—is limited. Ensuring that Sida staff across different sectors and levels are aware of and able to access Helpdesk services is essential for maximising its contribution going forward.

To remain fit-for-purpose, the Helpdesk will need to continue adapting its mandate, outreach, and capacity in line with Sweden's climate aid ambitions. This includes supporting more coherent integration of environmental perspectives across all sectors, and reinforcing good environmental governance practices. In doing so, the Helpdesk not only contributes to Sida's environmental and climate goals (SDG 13 and SDG 15), but also to SDG 16 by embedding principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making in its cross-thematic work.

5 Recommendations

This section presents clustered, actionable recommendations drawn from the evaluation findings and stakeholder inputs. Each recommendation is tagged to the relevant OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and corresponding findings.

5.1 FOR SIDA

1. Improve internal visibility and accessibility of the Helpdesk.

Criteria: *Relevance, Effectiveness* | **Related to:** *Findings 1, 4, 6*

Sida should take concrete steps to raise awareness of the Helpdesk across departments and embassies, particularly where familiarity with the service is limited. This includes:

- Enhancing Sida's intranet with clearer navigation and better searchability for Helpdesk information.
- Establishing specific sections and checklists for drafting the Terms of Reference (ToR), accompanied by clear guidelines on how to request assistance.
- Including Helpdesk updates in internal newsletters and thematic network communications.
- Developing a more comprehensive FAQ section.
- Encouraging central advisory teams to actively share and promote Helpdesk services.

2. Promote cross-sectoral uptake of Helpdesk guidance and support.

Criteria: *Coherence, Adaptiveness* | **Related to:** *Findings 7, 8*

Sida should actively engage Helpdesk expertise across non-environmental sectors such as agriculture, trade, finance, and rights-based programming. This can include:

- Commissioning guidance on environmental safeguards for financial instruments (e.g., guarantees, challenge funds).
- Facilitating information sharing with networks focused on private sector development, conflict, and migration.
- Highlighting the cross-sector relevance of regulations such as the EU deforestation-free supply chain law.

3. Strengthen uptake monitoring of Helpdesk services.

Criteria: *Effectiveness, Efficiency* | **Related to:** *Findings 4, 5, 6*

Sida should collaborate with the Helpdesk to develop simple and targeted follow-up tools to assess whether advice has been used and how it has influenced programming. This could build on the current sample-based follow-up model and should focus on:

- Capturing lessons on enabling or limiting factors for uptake.
- Improving internal learning on the Helpdesk's effectiveness.
- Informing future service design and allocation.

4. Expand Sida's Engagement In Emerging Technical And Thematic Areas.

Criteria: Relevance, Adaptiveness | *Related to:* Findings 6, 7

Develop a concise guidance note on minimum environmental and social safeguard requirements for financial instruments such as guarantees and challenge funds.

- This should include criteria to prevent harmful practices such as large-scale monocultures that risk displacing indigenous communities and promote sustainable land use.
- The guidance should cover responsible pesticide and fertiliser management and support for inclusive governance practices that protect the rights and livelihoods of vulnerable groups, particularly indigenous peoples.
- It should be made accessible to non-environmental staff working in sectors such as agriculture, private sector development, and food security, to ensure better risk mitigation and cross-sectoral coherence.

5.2 FOR THE HELPDESK

1. Increase collaboration with other Sida Helpdesks to enhance coherence.

Criteria: Coherence, Adaptiveness | *Related to:* Finding 8

The Helpdesk should institutionalise joint planning and delivery with other Helpdesks, especially in overlapping thematic areas. Priorities include:

- Conducting joint needs assessments with the Peace and Conflict Helpdesk to address climate-related fragility.
- Exploring collaboration with the Market Systems Development (MSD) Helpdesks to support green transition initiatives.

2. Incorporate environmental justice and governance dimensions into advisory work.

Criteria: Relevance, Coherence | *Related to:* Finding 8

The Helpdesk should explore integrating environmental justice frameworks and mediation mechanisms into its services, particularly in fragile contexts. This could include:

- Offering guidance on inclusive resource governance.
- Supporting SDG 16 by promoting transparency, accountability, and participation in environmental decision-making.
- Explore the integration of environmental justice frameworks and legislative mechanisms within the thematic services of the Environment and Climate

Helpdesk, ensuring access to mediation tools for safeguarding environmental rights.

3. Improve communication and transparency on completed assignments.

Criteria: Effectiveness, Efficiency | *Related to:* Findings 4, 5

The Helpdesk should publish non-sensitive summaries of completed assignments, highlighting lessons learned and examples of good practice. This could:

- Promote internal learning within Sida.
- Encourage wider use of advisory outputs.
- Build institutional memory on environment and climate integration.

4. Maintain a strong coordination core while expanding technical depth.

Criteria: Efficiency, Adaptiveness | *Related to:* Findings 6, 8T

The Helpdesk should explore opportunities for the Environment and Climate Helpdesk to work more closely with other Helpdesks, such as Market Systems Development (MSD) Helpdesk, to provide more comprehensive support on the green transition.

The Helpdesk would have to retain a small, permanent coordination nucleus. Expanding the pool of thematic experts (e.g., in climate finance, circular economy, or environmental conflict mediation) will add depth, but only if a central secretariat continues to curate knowledge products, harmonise guidance, and manage workflows.

Annex 1 – Terms of Reference

Terms of reference for the evaluation of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change 2022-2025 contribution nr 13301

Date: 2024-12-18

1. Introduction

Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change (the Helpdesk) is a government-agency collaboration between Sida, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Gothenburg University (GU). The main purpose of the collaboration is to promote enhanced integration of environmental issues and perspectives in Swedish development cooperation. The current agreement covers the period 2022-2025.

The Helpdesk is commissioned by Sida to assist its staff to integrate environmental perspectives into Swedish development cooperation. The Helpdesk gives support to Sida, on demand, by providing advice and strategic guidance on environmental integration at policy, program, and project level. It also supports capacity building, development of tools and methods for environmental integration and dialogue concerning environmental issues.

All Sida and Embassy staff can use the Helpdesk's services. Subject to Sida approval, partner organisations may also seek and obtain Helpdesk coaching support. The Helpdesk consists of a Core Team of experts that, supported by external experts, provide the advisory services to Sida in accordance with agreed objectives, timeline, and scope. The Helpdesk experts work part or full time with the

Helpdesk services and are employed by SLU or GU. For some assignments, external experts are contracted to take part in or undertake the assignments, while they in other cases deliver pro-bono advice.

The helpdesk is financed by "Strategin för Sveriges globala utvecklingssamarbete inom miljö, klimat och biologisk mångfald, 2022–2026" and managed as a development contribution in Sidas systems by the Unit for Climate and Environment.

Please see: [Sida's work with climate and environment | Sida](#)

2. Evaluation object: intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is: Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change (the Helpdesk) which is a government-agency collaboration between Sida, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Gothenburg University (GU).

The services is regulated in an agreement between Sida and SLU ”Överenskommelse om tjänsteköp mellan Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete (Sida) och Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet (SLU) angående Helpdesktjänster” with ToR for the services annexed.

The goal of the helpdesk services is to contribute to strengthen integration of environment and climate change aspects in all of Sida’s development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

The helpdesk performs on-demand services for Sida staff (first hand) and partners (second hand), in a number of areas related to environment and climate.

Results from the contribution are deliveries of services that Sida has requested according to the ToR and differ from results from a regular Sida contribution.

The budget for the helpdesk service is 12 million SEK /year financed by the Unit for Climate and Environment.

The Helpdesk shall provide technical advice and support in assignments from all Sida staff, both from HQ and from embassies/Section offices. Each assignment may take up to a maximum of 15 working days. In addition, longer-term support may be undertaken subject to the approval of Sida's responsible desk officer.

For further information, the ToR for the helpdesk is attached in annex A .

3. Evaluation purpose: intended use

The purpose or intended use of the evaluation is to:

- Support Sida to assess if the provided Helpdesk services are relevant and useful for Sida staff and learn and adapt in accordance to what works well and less well. The evaluation will be used to inform decisions on how the helpdesk services and it’s set-up may be adjusted and improved for an eventual new phase of the contribution;

4. Evaluation users

The table below lists the primary and secondary users of the evaluation. The **primary users** will use the findings of the evaluation directly, and will be involved in the evaluation during the whole process.

	Who	Why	How to interact with them
Primary users	-Responsible program managers at Sida’s unit CLIMATE Policy advisors environment and climate at Sida’s unit TEMA1.	Achieve the purpose of the evaluation (as in section 3)	See section 13 (organisation of evaluation management)

5. Evaluation purpose: timing

Dec 2024 – Feb 2025 (year 3-4 of current agreement).

6. Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope is limited to

- Current Agreement for Helpdesk 2022-2025
- No particular Geographical area
- Target group is Sida and Embassy staff
- No travel needed; interviews will be conducted via phone or in person when possible.

If needed, the scope of the evaluation may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report.

7. Evaluation questions

Sida works to create prerequisites for better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression. As the effects of climate change, loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation become increasingly alarming, inequalities, poverty, conflicts and vulnerability in individuals and societies will increase. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate environment into all Sida-financed projects and programmes. Environmental integration goes beyond “do no harm” – it requires you as a partner to adopt the mindset that sustainable development results cannot be delivered without considering and adhering to the planetary boundaries.

All Sida-financed projects and programmes must be based on an environmental assessment, which identifies entry points for integration of environment, climate change and biodiversity.

The helpdesk is mandated to provide advisory and technical services to be delivered to Sida which then contributes to adequate integration of environment into the Swedish international development cooperation activities, in accordance with the Swedish Government's requirements.

Evaluation questions:

- Question 1: To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk services provided Sida and Embassy staff and partners with relevant, comprehensible and timely support in accordance with the ToR for helpdesk services?
- Question 2. To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk shown adaptiveness? Is the helpdesk fit to deliver on the new requirements for Swedish development cooperation especially the goal of increased and effective climate aid.
- Question 3: How does Sida and Embassy staff perceive the relevance *effectiveness, quality, usefulness and accessibility* of the environment and climate helpdesk services?
- Question 4: To what extent has the helpdesk provided relevant support for staff and partners to deliver enhanced integration in line with the requirement in Sidas environment and management system.

Questions are expected to be further developed in the tender by the tenderer and further refined during the inception phase of the evaluation. Please note that in line with Sida's utilisation-focused approach, the final evaluation questions should always serve the overall purpose of the evaluation (the intended use and the primary users).

8. Evaluation quality

Evaluation quality concerns both the **evaluation approach**, i.e. how the evaluation work is implemented, and **evaluation methodology**, i.e. how the conclusions are made.

When it comes to the **evaluation approach**, the evaluation shall:

- be utilisation-focused
- take Sida's development perspectives into account
- make sure no one is harmed

The evaluation shall be utilisation-focused which means that the evaluators must facilitate the entire evaluation process with careful consideration of how all aspects of the evaluation will affect the use of the evaluation. Therefore, the evaluation must be planned and conducted in ways to enhance the utilisation of both the findings and of the process itself, to inform decisions and improve performance. This approach entails close interaction between the evaluators and the primary users in the evaluation assignment. The interaction must last throughout the entire evaluation process. An important component of this participatory approach is to enable joint knowledge creation between evaluators and the users of the evaluation. The evaluation process shall be adapted to major context changes if needed, so that the evaluation always continues to serve the overall purpose/intended use.

Whenever relevant the evaluation shall take Sida's five development perspectives into account, when they design and implement the evaluation.¹ The perspectives shall be integrated in all Sida's operations and shall therefore be considered in the evaluation design and implementation of the evaluation.

The evaluators must consider if any part of their work can harm any group, especially groups that face discrimination. If so, they need to mitigate these risks. In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators have to ensure an evaluation design and process that do not put informants and stakeholders at risk in any step of the evaluation process.

When it comes to **evaluation methodology**, the evaluation shall:

- be reliable
- be transparent

Reliable means that the ambition at the outset is that the evaluators will handle all relevant methodological challenges so that each conclusion can be trusted beyond reasonable doubt and can hold up against external scrutiny. A lower level of reliability for specific questions is only acceptable if it is due to reasons that was not foreseeable at the outset or if it was agreed at start of the evaluation.

Transparent means that it shall be clear to the users of the evaluation how reliable each conclusion is. Hence, when a conclusion is stated it shall be clear if it is speculative or whether there are some other specific methodological considerations that affect the reliability.

Furthermore, it shall be possible for the users to understand how the evaluators handle relevant methodological challenges for each conclusion. The methodological challenges includes (to the extent relevant):

- How data was collected and processed. This includes sampling methods, interview techniques and cleaning protocol, as required by the chosen evaluation design.
- How source criticism was applied. This includes assessing the potential biases of the sources, and assessing how the sources know what they claim. When a source is

triangulated it includes an assessment of whether the triangulated sources are independent from each other and/or have opposing biases.

- How the evaluators arrived at descriptive conclusions. This includes the operationalization of concepts, e.g. a description of how concepts are defined in terms of observables.
- How the evaluators inferred causality. This means describing how the evaluators move from observations (e.g. observing that the cause happened and that the effect happened), to inferring that there is a causal link between cause and effect. A respondent claiming that there was an causal effect is not, in itself, sufficient evidence, unless there has to be some reason to believe that the respondent were able to infer causality.
- How generalisation beyond the collected data is made (e.g. through representative sampling or some theory based argument). If the generalisation is based on an informal assessment, then this should be made clear to the users.

The evaluators shall have an **independent quality assurance** during the evaluation process. One aim of the quality assurance should be to ensure that the evaluation meets the quality expectations that are outlined in these ToR. Evaluators should be prepared to share the evaluation data and analysis in a GDPR compliant manner, with Sida upon request.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, the evaluation shall conform to OECD/DAC (2010) “Quality Standards for Development Evaluation” and OECD/DAC (2014) “Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation”, as well as the OECD/DAC (2021) “Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully”.

9. Time schedule

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Alternative deadlines for deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting/s VIRTUAL	Helpdesk representatives and programme officer	Week beginning w Jan 13
2. Inception phase	Evaluators	2 weeks from the start-up meeting to draft an inception report. Week beginning w 27 th Jan.
3. Draft inception report		Tentative Week beginning w 27 th Jan.
4. Intended users read the draft inception report	Primary users Program officer KLIMAT and Thematic advisors TEMA1.	Allow / 2 weeks for commenting

5. Deadline for comments from intended users to evaluators		Tentative Week beginning w 10 th FEB.
6. Inception meeting VIRTUAL	Evaluators, helpdesk, Program officer, thematic advisor.	Tentative 13 th Feb
7. Revise inception report	Evaluators	
8. Deadline final inception report		Tentative Feb 24
9. Data collection & analysis phase	Evaluators	March
10. Debriefing/validation/ meeting(s)	Sida, Evaluators	Tentative 15 th
11. Draft report writing phase	Evaluators	2 weeks
12. Submission of draft evaluation report		Tentative 31 March
13. Primary users read and comment draft report	Primary users	2 weeks for comments
14. Deadline to submit comments to evaluators		Tentative 14 April
15. Final report writing phase	Evaluators	1 week for revisions
16. Final evaluation report		Tentative 22 April
17. Dissemination Seminar At Sida HQ or virtual	Sida staff	Tentative end of April

10. The deliverables

The evaluators shall, during the course of the evaluation, produce a number of deliverables. These are outlined below.

10.1 The proposal

Before the evaluation starts, the evaluators shall submit their proposal. This is described in the call-off document.

10.2 The inception report

The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation team proceeds with the implementation. The inception report should be written in English. The inception report should be maximum 15 pages.

The inception report should further develop the **evaluation approach**, including:

- A description of the consultant's understanding of the Helpdesk services.
- how to apply the utilisation-focused approach e.g. how the intended users will participate in and contribute to the process
- how to apply Sida's development perspectives to the evaluation process
- how to make sure no one is harmed by the evaluation

The inception report should also develop and refine the **stakeholder analysis** that is outlined in section 4 above. The stakeholder analysis should describe:

- the different stakeholders' interests or values in the evaluation process
- the stakeholders' roles in the evaluation process
- a clear process description of stakeholder participation

During the inception phase, the evaluator and the users shall agree on who will be responsible for keeping the various stakeholders informed about the evaluation and how to ensure their participation.

The evaluators should develop the **design and methods** in detail during the inception phase and present them in the inception report. This involves describing how the methodological challenges in section 8 will be handled for each evaluation question:

- how to collect and process data
- how to apply source criticism
- how to make descriptive conclusions
- how to infer causality
- how to generalise beyond the data generated

All limitations to the evaluation design and methods shall be made explicit, in addition to any remaining underlying assumptions. The consequences of these limitations and assumptions for the evaluation outputs should be discussed. This information should usually be presented in the form of an evaluation matrix.

As a general rule, the evaluators should develop the **theory of change** of the intervention in the inception report. The inception report should at a minimum include:

- a description of the rationale for the intervention
- the objectives of the intervention
- how the evaluated intervention has – or is expected to – support end-beneficiaries
- major underlying factors/assumptions that affect the success of the intervention

The inception report should include a reassessment of the **evaluability**² of the evaluation questions. The reassessment can lead to that Sida agrees to adjust the evaluation questions or the scope of the evaluation, but only under the following conditions:

- the reassessment of the evaluability is based on information that was not known when the evaluators accepted the proposal and which could not have been foreseen by the evaluators when they wrote the proposal, and
- the reassessment is based on things that are verifiable (at least in principle) by Sida

The inception report should include a detailed **time and work plan**, including:

- number of working days for each team member for the remainder of the evaluation
- space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation

10.3 Deliverables during the data collection and analysis phase

During the data collection and analysis phase, the evaluators will implement the data collection and analysis plan developed during the inception phase.

As mentioned above, an important component of Sida's utilisation focused approach is to enable joint knowledge creation between the evaluators and the users of the evaluation. The evaluators therefore need to plan for and conduct **participatory workshop(s)** with different key stakeholders in a relevant manner to the particular evaluation.

10.4 The final report

The final report should be no more than a maximum of 35 pages excluding annexes. It shall be written in English,. The report should be written in a plain, clear and unambiguous language. It should be easily understood by the primary users of the evaluation, as defined in these ToR, and the form of the report should be appropriate given the purpose(s) of the evaluation. It should have a clear structure and follow the format and instructions outlined in Sida's report template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C). To assure these goals the report should be professionally proof-red.

The executive summary of the final report should be maximum 5 to 8 pages pages. In the executive summary the key findings should be presented as early as possible in the text. It should be clear to the reader how reliable each conclusion is, especially if a conclusion is based on less reliable evidence.

The executive summary should easily be understood by all intended audience(s), including both primary and secondary users. Hence, in terms of the accessibility of the language, the requirements are higher for the executive summary than for the rest of the report.

The main body of the report shall present the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned separately and with a clear distinction between them. Recommendations should flow logically from conclusions and be specific and directed to relevant intended users. It should be clear which recommendations are most important / priority to address.

Evaluation findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis, meaning each finding should be presented in a way that clarifies what evidence it is based on and how reliable that evidence is. Hence, the reader should be able to understand how the evaluators handled all the methodological problems outlined in section 8 above, to the extent relevant (i.e. data collection and processing, source criticism, descriptive conclusions, causal inference and generalisations).

The **final report annexes** shall always include:

- the ToR
- the stakeholder analysis³
- the evaluation matrix (or equivalent presentation).

The inception report does not have to be included in its entirety in the final report annexes. However, major diversions from the assignment as outlined in these ToR, should be described in the final report annexes. The annexes shall describe:

- the purpose of the evaluation, specifically who is supposed to use the evaluation and for what
- how the utilisation-focused approach has been implemented during the evaluation, including how the intended users participated in and contributed to the process and how process use was facilitated, i.e. how the evaluators created space for reflection
- how the evaluators applied Sida's development perspectives to the evaluation process, and how they made sure no one was harmed by the evaluation

The final report annexes can also include evaluation management issues e.g. who was consulted when and key meetings that were held. Lists of key informants/interviewees shall only include personally identifiable data if this is deemed safe and relevant (i.e. when it is contributing to the credibility of the evaluation) based on a case based assessment by the evaluator and the commissioning unit/embassy. The inclusion of personally identifiable data in the report must always be supported by written or otherwise recorded consent.

11. Publication of the final report

The evaluator shall, upon approval by Sida/Embassy of the final report, and using Sida's template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C) and submit it to Nordic Morning (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication database. The order is placed by sending the approved report to Nordic Morning (sida@ljungbergs.se), with a copy to the responsible Sida Programme Officer as well as Sida's Evaluation Unit (evaluation@sida.se). Write "Sida decentralised evaluations" in the email subject field. The following information must always be included in the order to Nordic Morning:

1. The name of the consulting company.
2. The full evaluation title.
3. The invoice reference "ZZ6150031".
4. Type of allocation: "sakanslag".
5. Type of order: "digital publicering/publikationsdatabas".

12. The call-off response

See the call-off inquiry document.

13. Organisation of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by The unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT). The primary intended user is/are -Responsible program managers at Sida's unit CLIMATE and Policy advisors at Sida's unit TEMA1.

The evaluand SLU and GU has contributed to the ToR and will be provided an opportunity to comment on the inception report as well as the final report, but will not be involved in the management of the evaluation. Hence the commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the inception report and the final report of the evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the commissioner only.

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is 400 000 SEK.

The contact person at Sida/Swedish Embassy is Linnea Hermansen GLOBALA/KLIMAT. The contact person should be consulted if any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant Sida documentation will be provided by Linnea Hermansen GLOBALA/KLIMAT

Contact details to intended users (cooperation partners, Swedish Embassies, other donors etc.) will be provided by Linnea Hermansen GLOBALA/KLIMAT.

The evaluator will be required to arrange the logistics to book interviews and prepare visits etc.

14. Annexes

Annex A “List of key documentation”,

Annex B “Data sheet on the evaluation object”

Annex A: List of key documentation

- Sida's work with climate and environment | Sida
- “Government Agency Collaboration for HELPDESK SERVICES ON ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE” (2023)
- ”Överenskommelse om tjänsteköp mellan Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete (Sida) och Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet (SLU) angående Helpdesktjänster” (2019)
- “NIRAS Review of the Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change” (2021)
- ”Genomlysning av Sidas ”helpdesk” för miljö och klimat” (2015)

Annex B: Data sheet on the evaluation object

Information on the evaluation object (i.e. intervention)	
Title of the evaluation object	Sida helpdesk for Environment and Climate
ID no. in PLANIt	13301
Dox no./Archive case no.	21/000705
Activity period (if applicable)	2022-2025
Agreed budget (if applicable)	Maximum 12 MSEK/year
Main sector	Environment; agriculture and forestry;
Name and type of implementing organisation	Universities
Aid type	Experts/technical assistance;
Swedish strategy	Strategin för Sveriges globala utvecklingssamarbete inom miljö, klimat och biologisk mångfald, 2022–2026

Information on the evaluation assignment	
Commissioning unit/Swedish Embassy	Unit for Environment and Climate
Contact person at unit/Swedish Embassy	Linnéa Hermansen
Timing of evaluation (mid-term, end-of-programme, ex-post, or other)	Third year of intervention
ID no. in PLANIt (if other than above).	

Annex 2 – People Consulted

Sida suggested list of contacts		
Name	Rationale	Helpdesk comment
Staff, Sida	Peace and Security helpdesk: involved in the Yemen-study	Yemen assignment: 2-3 helpdesks worked in parallel (not joint studies)
Staff, Sida	Sida responsible manager, based at the embassy in Amman, Jordan: involved in the Yemen-study	UM Amman
Staff, Sida	Sida staff	Africa Dept/Op CAVA. Many contacts with Helpdesk over the years
Staff, Sida		Results/Tema 1. Lead policy specialist Env & CC
Staff, Sida	Responsible for helpdesk at thematic unit	Results/Tema 1
Staff, Sida	Responsible for Helpdesk at CLIMATE unit	
Staff, Sida		Op Africa
Staff, Sida		Emb/Nairobi/Team Leader Team Env Africa
Staff, Sida		Op Africa. Team Environment Africa
Staff, Sida		Op Global. Former Helpdesk PM
Staff, Sida		LAMENA/Asia
Staff, Sida		Results/Tema 1. Many contacts with Helpdesk over the years
Staff, Sida		Results/Tema 1/GCF. Energy
Staff, Sida		Previously Emb Bkk
Staff, Sida		Also, Latin America
Staff, Sida		Emb Nairobi, NPO
Staff, Sida		Emb Maputo. PO. Many contacts with Helpdesk in recent years
Staff, Sida	PO who works in other thematic areas	
Staff, Sida	PM who works in other thematic areas	
Staff, Sida	PO who works in other thematic areas	
Staff, Sida	Heads of Units/Heads of development cooperation section at Swedish embassies	Formerly Head of GLOBEN (responsible for Env CC Helpdesk)
Staff, Sida	Heads of Units/Heads of development cooperation	

	section at Swedish embassies	
Staff, Sida	Heads of Units/Heads of dev coop section at Swedish embassies	
Staff, Sida	Heads of Units/Heads of dev coop section at Swedish embassies	
Helpdesk suggested list of contacts		
Name	Unit	Helpdesk comment
Heads of units/departments		
Staff, Sida	Head of RESULT Department	Former Head of Dev. Coop Nairobi and Bogotá; has been long time at Sida, seen many versions of the Helpdesk
Staff, Sida	Head of Development Cooperation, Embassy in Addis Abeba	Head of dev.coop Regional Africa
Staff, Sida	Africa Department., Head of CAVA	Former PO, Team Leader Team Env Africa,
Embassy staff		
National Programme Officers		
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Sarajevo	NPO - Europe
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Tirana	NPO - Europe
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Monrovia	NPO - Africa
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Bangkok	NPO - Asia
Emb Programme officers		
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Addis Abeba	Regional Africa/Env CC
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Dar es Salaam	Africa. Env/CC/Energy. Former UM/Regional Africa
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Bangkok	Regional Asia/Env CC. Former Water policy specialist at HQ
Staff, Sida	Embassy	Africa, SRHR. PO who works in other thematic areas
Staff, Sida	Embassy in Bangkok	Asia
Sida Headquarters		
Staff, Sida	ADMIN/STYR	Former Emb/Harare and Tema
Staff, Sida	Global Op	Research cooperation
Staff, Sida	Africa Department/SORA	
Staff, Sida	Africa Department	Social protection (PO who works in other thematic areas)
Staff, Sida		Health (PO who works in other thematic areas)
Staff, Sida	Europe Department	Europe/Armenia, waste management, circular economy
Staff, Sida		Used to work with HUM
Staff, Sida	Europe Department	PO who works in other thematic area
Staff, Sida	Op CSO	

Staff, Sida	Op Global	
Staff, Sida	OP/FREDMIG	PO who works in other thematic area
Staff, Sida	Op LAMENA/ASIA	
Staff, Sida	Results/Tema 1	biodiversity, Europe
Sida partners		
Sida Partner staff	Kvinna till Kvinna (Swedish CSO)	Env Spot-check, integration, other thematic area
Sida Partner staff	Act Svenska kyrkan (Swedish CSO)	Env Spot-check, integration, other thematic area
Sida Partner staff	WHO	Head of Env and Climate Change at WHO. Involved in a Central Environmental Review.
Helpdesk staff		
Helpdesk staff	Wexus/GU	Team leader
Helpdesk staff	SLU	Quality manager
Helpdesk staff	SLU	Expert
Helpdesk staff	Wexus/GU	Expert
Helpdesk staff	SLU	Expert
Helpdesk staff	SLU	Expert
Helpdesk staff	SLU	Expert
External Experts to Helpdesk		
External Experts to Helpdesk	SEI	Main contact at SEI
External Experts to Helpdesk	Avfall Sverige	EE waste management expert, Assignments mainly in Eastern Europe

Annex 3 – Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation questions	Indicators/ judgment criteria	Methods	Sources	Availability/ reliability of data
Relevance				
EQ1 To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk services provided Sida and Embassy staff and partners with relevant, comprehensible, and timely support in accordance with the ToR for helpdesk services?"	1.1. Extent to which helpdesk responses align with the thematic and technical needs of Sida, embassies, and partners. 1.2. Perceived usefulness of helpdesk support in informing decision-making and programming. 1.3. Clarity and accessibility of responses provided by the helpdesk (e.g., language, structure, level of technical detail). Adherence to the 15-working-day maximum response time. Stakeholder satisfaction with response time relative to urgency of request. 1.4. Extent to which helpdesk services are provided within the scope defined by the ToR.	Document review (ToR, helpdesk queries and responses, thematic reports). - User surveys. - Key informant interviews (KIIs).	Helpdesk records - Sida and embassy staff - Approved partners - Survey respondents	The necessary sources for assessing the relevance, comprehensibility, and timeliness of helpdesk services are available. Helpdesk records and documented responses provide an objective basis for evaluating response times, alignment with ToR, and clarity. Additionally, surveys and interviews with Sida staff, Embassy personnel, and approved partners will offer critical insights into stakeholder perceptions and the practical utility of helpdesk support.
EQ2: To what extent has the helpdesk provided relevant support for staff and partners to deliver enhanced integration in line with the requirements in Sida's environment and management system?	4.1. Alignment of helpdesk support with Sida's environmental management system and related policies. 4.2. Extent to which helpdesk services contribute to capacity building, tool development, and strategic guidance for environmental integration. 4.3. Perceived usefulness of helpdesk-provided tools, training, and strategic guidance in operationalizing environmental and climate integration. 4.4. Level of engagement and uptake of helpdesk support among Sida staff and partners. 4.5. Practical application of helpdesk recommendations by Sida and partners.	Document review (ToR, helpdesk reports, environmental policies). - Key informant interviews (KIIs) with Sida staff and partners. - User surveys. - Evaluation matrix linking deliverables to integration objectives.	Sida staff. - Embassy personnel. - Sida partners. - Helpdesk records and reports. - Sida environmental management policies.	The necessary sources for assessing the helpdesk's role in supporting environmental integration are available. Sida's environmental policies, helpdesk reports, and training records provide an objective basis for evaluation. However, practical application and effectiveness require validation through user surveys and interviews, ensuring a balanced assessment of perceived versus actual integration.
Effectiveness				
EQ 3: "How does Sida and Embassy staff perceive the relevance, effectiveness,	3.1. Extent to which Sida and Embassy staff perceive the helpdesk services as relevant to their needs and priorities. 3.2. Perceived effectiveness of helpdesk support in addressing	User surveys. - Key informant interviews (KIIs) with Sida and	Sida staff. - Embassy personnel.	The necessary sources for assessing the relevance, effectiveness, quality, usefulness, and accessibility of helpdesk services are available.

ANNEX 3 – EVALUATION MATRIX

quality, usefulness, and accessibility of the environment and climate helpdesk services?"	queries and supporting decision-making. 3.3. Quality of responses provided in terms of technical depth, accuracy, and clarity. 3.4. Usefulness of helpdesk outputs in influencing policies, programs, and operational work. 3.5. Accessibility of the helpdesk in terms of ease of request submission, response times, and user-friendliness of support.	Embassy staff. - Document review of feedback records and service request logs.	- Helpdesk records. - Feedback reports. - Survey respondents.	The large list of informants is compiled with the help of Sida and Help desk colleagues. User surveys, interviews, and feedback reports provide a strong basis for evaluating stakeholder perceptions. However, individual experiences and expectations may vary, requiring careful triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a balanced assessment.
<i>Coherence & Adaptiveness (linked to Sustainability & Impact in OECD DAC terms)</i>				
EQ 4:"To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk shown adaptiveness? Is the helpdesk fit to deliver on the new requirements for Swedish development cooperation, especially the goal of increased and effective climate aid?"	2.1. Responsiveness to evolving requests from Sida and Embassy staff. 2. 2. Flexibility in modifying guidance and outputs based on stakeholder feedback. 2.3. Extent to which helpdesk services align with evolving Swedish development cooperation policies. 2.4. Integration of climate aid priorities in service delivery. 2.5. Capacity to meet increased demand and evolving priorities. 2.6. Identification of gaps in expertise, tools, and methodologies required for future needs.	Document review (helpdesk logs, emails, ToR updates). - User surveys. - Key informant interviews (KIIs). - Review of training records, hiring trends, and resource allocation. - KIIs with Sida staff and helpdesk management. -Review of implemented evaluation's recommendations	Helpdesk records - TEMA1-staff - Approved partners - Sida policy advisors - Helpdesk training records - Resource allocation plans. Helpdesk personnel - Sida management - Budget and resource documents	Helpdesk records, past reports, and policy documents provide an empirical basis for evaluating adaptiveness and strategic alignment. Surveys and interviews with Sida staff, policy advisors, and helpdesk personnel will be essential for assessing stakeholder perceptions and identifying capacity gaps. Previous Evaluation report and recommendations

Annex 4 – Documents Consulted

Links received (email from Linnea Hermansen 21.02.2025)

[Home | Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change](#)

Short clip that the helpdesk developed for communication purposes on YouTube: [Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate change](#)

Summary of helpdesk assignments 24 and 23 [Helpdesk assignments and reports | Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change](#)

Documents

4 short Terms of Reference

ToR CER WHO

ToR NDC

Activity Report, T2 2024

Activity Report, T1 2024

Activity Report, T3 2024

Activity Report, T2 2023

Activity Report, T1 2023

Activity Report, T3 2023

Helpdesk Annual Assignment Summary 2023

Helpdesk Annual Assignment Summary 2024, web version

Semi-annual Activity report 2022, Period 1 July – 31 December 2022

Semi-annual Activity report 2022, Period 1 January – 30 June 2022

Environment Helpdesk Administrative Manual 2025

Genomlysning av Sidas “helpdesk for miljö och klimat”, 20215 (Review of Sida’s Helpdesk for Environment and Climate, 2015)

Överenskommelse om tjänsteköp mellan Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete (Sida) och Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet (SLU) angående Helpdesktjänster, 2022 (Service Purchase Agreement between the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Sida) and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) regarding Helpdesk Services, 2022) (saved in folder “ToR and background documents”)

Bilag B, Terms of Reference Government Agency Collaboration for Helpdesk Services on Environment and Climate Change, 2023

NIRAS Final report, Review of the Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, 2021 (saved in folder “ToR and background documents”)

Annex 5 – Inception Report

Background to the assignment

Context

The evaluation is commissioned by **Sida's Unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT)**. This unit is responsible for managing the evaluation process, approving key deliverables (e.g., inception report and final report), and facilitating interactions between evaluators and primary users. The evaluation aims to assess and enhance the relevance and utility of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- **Assess the relevance, effectiveness, and usefulness** of the Helpdesk's services in supporting Sida staff and partners.
- **Determine how well the Helpdesk has adapted** to evolving priorities and strategic goals.
- **Provide actionable recommendations** to improve the design, delivery, and scope of the Helpdesk's services.
- **Support decision-making** on whether and how to continue the Helpdesk's operation in a subsequent phase.

The scope of the evaluation is as follows:

Country	Agency	Period	Sector	SDG	Amount committed
Global	Sida, SLU, GU	2022–25	Environment, Agriculture, Climate	SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land)	12 million SEK/year

Users of the evaluation

The primary users of this evaluation are the following groups of Sida staff:

- Sida's **Programme Managers** at the Unit for Climate and Environment (KLIMAT), who oversee the Helpdesk's contribution.
- **Policy Advisers** for environment and climate at Sida's thematic unit (TEMA1), who utilize the Helpdesk services in their strategic and operational roles.

Other important stakeholders of the evaluation include:

- **Embassy Staff**, who use the Helpdesk to manage and integrate climate and environmental considerations into country-level programming.
- **Partner Organisations** approved by Sida to access the Helpdesk for coaching and capacity development.
- The **Helpdesk Core Team**, comprised of experts from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Gothenburg University (GU), responsible for service delivery.
- **External Experts**, contracted for specialized assignments as needed.
- **Wider public and taxpayers, the international community, youth CSOs and academia** working in the field of environment.

Please see Appendix 5 for suggested list of informants, from which the interviewees will be sampled.

Inception Phase

The inception phase of the evaluation commenced with a first kick-off meeting on February 21, 2025, held via Teams. The meeting was attended by Sida representatives Ola Möller (Policy Advisor, Thematic Support Unit) and Linnea Hermansen (Program Manager, Global Department, Climate Unit), along with the evaluation team from Niras.

The primary focus of the discussion was to clarify **the purpose and expectations** of the evaluation, which aims to assess the Sida Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, managed by SLU and Gothenburg University. The Helpdesk functions as a demand-driven service with an annual budget of 10–12 MSEK, and 2025 marks the final year of the current agreement. The evaluation is intended to inform Sida's decision on a potential extension and identify areas for learning and improvement.

While Sida has previously conducted internal follow-ups, this external evaluation will provide a broader perspective on the Helpdesk's service quality, adaptability, and effectiveness. It was emphasized that the evaluation will **not assess the technical accuracy of the advice provided**. Instead, it will **focus on the structure, operations, and responsiveness of the Helpdesk**, including an examination of cases where services did not meet expectations and an assessment of contributing factors such as Terms of Reference and instructions. Additionally, the evaluation will explore **collaboration with other Helpdesks**. Given the scope and available resources, the evaluation is categorized as a **"medium level" review**, with an emphasis on setting realistic expectations.

Key methodological aspects were also discussed, including the distribution of surveys to Sida staff, as well as conducting targeted interviews to gather in-depth insights.

The second Inception meeting was conducted on March 3, 2025, with the Helpdesk and brought together Gunilla Ölund Wingqvist, Team Leader; Eva Stephansson, Quality Manager; and Sida representatives Ola Möller, Policy Advisor, Thematic Support Unit; and Linnea Hermansen, Program Manager, Global Department, Climate Unit. During the meeting, discussions focused on the Helpdesk's operational model, effectiveness, adaptability, and relevance. The demand-driven model means that the Helpdesk responds to Sida's requests and needs, which in turn reflects how Sida adjusts its support to evolving priorities over time. The Helpdesk does not influence the requests, but ensures that it is prepared to respond to the variety of requests and emerging priorities over time.

Key Agreements and Next Steps

- The evaluation will **focus on service quality, timeliness, and adaptability** rather than traditional project-based effectiveness indicators.
- The survey design will be refined and distributed with Sida's assistance to embassy colleagues.
- The **evaluation will acknowledge the Helpdesk's primary mandate** (environment and climate) while considering Sida's **five development perspectives** (gender, environment, conflict, human rights, poverty).
- The **inception report will further define evaluation criteria and methodology**, ensuring alignment with the Helpdesk's operational realities.
- Sida will **provide an initial list of informants**, and the Helpdesk team will **share key documentation**, including an **administrative manual and assignment-related records**.

The meeting set the stage for a **realistic and focused evaluation**, balancing Sida's objectives with the operational constraints of the Helpdesk.

Evaluation object: Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change

During the inception phase an initial document review was carried out by the evaluation team. Findings from the initial document review can be found in Appendix 2.

Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change

The evaluator received multiple reports from the Helpdesk that provide a comprehensive record of activities and assignments over various reporting periods, including quarterly and semi-annual activity reports for 2022, 2023, and 2024, along with annual summaries of Helpdesk assignments (Appendix 4). These reports document the progress and key developments. Established through a collaboration between the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), and the University of Gothenburg's West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development (Wexusus), the Helpdesk serves as a resource for Sida and its embassies.

The Helpdesk is set up to provide service delivery, and operational support to ensure environmental considerations remain central to development efforts. The services include project-based environmental integration, for instance, in SRHR and regional programmes, sustainable finance and learning-oriented assignments. The revisions of the Administrative Manual of the Help Desk indicate that this organization was established to support Sida staff and their partners. The helpdesk operates under a management structure to ensure effective delivery of services. The organizational framework comprises a Management Team (MT) and a Core Team (CT), each with specific roles that facilitate the helpdesk's functions. The MT, which includes the Team Leader (TL) and the Quality Manager (QM), are responsible for strategic planning, quality assurance, and the alignment of activities with overarching goals. Regular meetings, both internally and with Sida, are taking place.

The helpdesk provides a range of services, from environmental assessments to capacity-building initiatives, tailored to environmental considerations in development projects. The helpdesk maintains an active online presence via its website. The helpdesk operates under legal frameworks to manage agreements with Sida and other partners effectively. These agreements outline the responsibilities and expectations of all parties involved.

The Inception Phase's review of Helpdesk reports from 2022 to 2024 revealed following lessons learned¹⁹:

- Sida's long-term collaborations, have been instrumental in strengthening environmental considerations within Sida's operations. However, the growing complexity of assignments necessitates increased flexibility in time allocation and budgeting.
- Embassies remain key stakeholders, and further efforts are required to enhance their capacity for environmental mainstreaming.
- A recurring challenge is inconsistent awareness of Helpdesk services among Sida Programme Officers (POs), particularly regarding support beyond proposal reviews. Addressing this requires enhanced communication and capacity-building initiatives.
- Additionally, expectations for deliverables vary, with some POs preferring detailed written reports, while others favour shorter briefs, presentations, or process-oriented support. To better meet these diverse needs, the Helpdesk is exploring more flexible output formats.
- Sida's limited follow-up on environmental recommendations has also been identified. While environmental assessments are integrated into project planning, implementation and monitoring efforts require reinforcement.
- The Helpdesk has emphasized the importance of incorporating systematic environmental follow-ups into Sida's project monitoring frameworks to ensure sustained impact. Regular stakeholder engagement remains critical for knowledge sharing and effective implementation.
- The Biodiversity Info Blitz at Sida Rissne in May 2023 demonstrated the value of in-person interactions in strengthening environmental awareness and the adoption of sustainability measures.

¹⁹ Extracted from Helpdesk narrative periodic reports.

Approach and methodology

Overall approach

The evaluation will adopt a **utilisation-focused approach**, as stipulated in the Terms of Reference (ToR), to ensure that findings and recommendations are actionable and directly inform decision-making for improving Sida's helpdesk services. This approach emphasizes close interaction with the intended users throughout the evaluation process, facilitating joint knowledge creation and ensuring that the evaluation aligns with Sida's strategic objectives. The evaluation will also integrate **Sida's development perspectives**, including human rights, gender equality, conflict sensitivity, and environmental sustainability, into the design and implementation. The principles of reliability, transparency, and stakeholder participation will underpin all phases of the evaluation to ensure credible and actionable results.

Evaluation approach

Based on the **formal and substantive evaluability analysis** (see **section 4.2.1** below), the evaluation will adopt a **mixed-methods approach**:

- **Document Review:** The evaluator will analyse helpdesk service logs, Sida's strategic policies, and environmental management frameworks.
- **Surveys and Key Informant Interviews (KIs):** The evaluator will collect stakeholder perceptions on the relevance, effectiveness, and accessibility of helpdesk services.
- **Case Studies:** The evaluator will illustrate instances of helpdesk adaptiveness and impact on Sida's climate programming.
- **Theory of Change (ToC) Analysis:** The evaluator will assess whether helpdesk support contributes to improved environmental integration in Sida's work. The implicit ToC suggests that **better access to environmental expertise leads to stronger integration of environmental considerations in Sida's operations**. However, this link is not explicitly documented. Therefore, the postulate that will guide the theory of the evaluation is the following:

*If Sida improves access to environmental expertise, **then** the integration of environmental considerations in its operations will be strengthened, **because** increased expertise enhances knowledge, decision-making, and implementation capacity, leading to more effective and sustainable environmental interventions.*

- **Triangulation:** The evaluator will balance subjective and objective findings by comparing multiple data sources, use of a variety of information sources (qualitative and quantitative), diversity of voices heard, and systematic proof search: search for evidence to support or refute evaluation findings, systematically examining different sources of information for consistency and coherence²⁰.
- **Process focus:** actions within the programme will be analysed as a process, involving the interaction among several actors and the matching of the activities with larger, overarching processes, understanding how various actions and interactions unfold over time and how they contribute to achieving larger, overarching goals or objectives.

²⁰ See: Systemic review. Better Evaluation Knowledge, available at <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/systematic-review>, last visited < 15.03.2025 >

Evaluability Analysis Framework

The following Evaluability Analysis assesses the formal and substantive dimensions of the evaluation and any implications for the proposed methodology.

Criteria	Assessment	Implications for Methodology
Outputs and Deliverables	The helpdesk has documented service logs, reports, and thematic guidance that can be assessed for relevance, timeliness, and alignment with ToR.	The evaluator will use document review of service logs, helpdesk reports, and strategic documents.
Indicators and Judgment Criteria	Key indicators such as response times, stakeholder satisfaction, and the extent of environmental integration are available but may require further refinement.	The evaluator will use an evaluation matrix linking each EQ to indicators, data sources, and methods.
Baseline and Comparison Data	There is no explicit baseline; however, past helpdesk reports, and service records provide historical data for trend analysis. Some information about both relevance and attitudes towards Helpdesk advice can be found in previous external reviews (Niras 2021, and Bjerninger 2015)	The evaluator will use retrospective analysis to compare past and present performance. Case studies will illustrate changes in helpdesk adaptability.
Data Availability and Quality	Helpdesk records and Sida's strategic documents are accessible. However, stakeholder perceptions may introduce subjective biases.	The evaluator will use triangulation : combining document review, surveys, and key informant interviews (KIIs).
Problem Identification	The helpdesk is intended to strengthen environmental and climate integration in Sida's programming, capacity-building by providing relevant and timely support to staff and partners.	The evaluator will assess whether the helpdesk's ToR /assignments/deliverables align with Sida's evolving climate and environmental goals .
Theory of Change (ToC)	The implicit ToC suggests that better access to environmental expertise leads to stronger integration of environmental considerations in Sida's operations . However, this link is not explicitly documented.	The evaluator will use a ToC reconstruction through document review and stakeholder interviews to assess whether helpdesk services contribute to intended outcomes.
Results Framework and Strategic Fit	Sida's environmental management system and climate policies provide a framework for evaluating helpdesk relevance and effectiveness. However, helpdesk impact on broader policy objectives may be difficult to measure directly.	If possible, the evaluator will use contribution analysis to determine the extent to which the helpdesk has influenced policy decisions and environmental integration.
Stakeholder Engagement	Sida staff, embassy personnel, and partners are key beneficiaries of the helpdesk, but levels of engagement and perceived usefulness may vary.	The evaluator will use surveys and KIIs to capture diverse perspectives on the helpdesk's role, effectiveness, and adaptability.

The evaluation is, therefore, feasible, given the availability of key data sources, including helpdesk records, policy documents, and stakeholder feedback. However, some limitations remain, such as the absence of a formal baseline and the challenge of isolating the helpdesk's impact from other Sida initiatives. To address these challenges, the evaluation will apply methodological triangulation and contribution analysis, ensuring a robust and actionable assessment.

Evaluation questions, judgement criteria and data sources

The evaluation will focus on four key questions:

1. **Relevance**
 - **EQ1:** *To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk services provided Sida and Embassy staff and partners with relevant, comprehensible, and timely support in accordance with the ToR for helpdesk services?*
 - **EQ4:** *To what extent has the helpdesk provided relevant support for staff and partners to deliver enhanced integration in line with the requirements in Sida's environment and management system?*
2. **Effectiveness**
 - **EQ3:** *How do Sida and Embassy staff perceive the relevance, effectiveness, quality, usefulness, and accessibility of the environment and climate helpdesk services?*
3. **Coherence & Adaptiveness**
 - **EQ2:** *To what extent have the environment and climate helpdesk shown adaptiveness? Is the helpdesk fit to deliver on the new requirements for Swedish development cooperation, especially the goal of increased and effective climate aid?*

The order of the EQs was **restructured** to align with the logical flow of an evaluation:

- **Relevance first** (EQ1 & EQ4) to establish the necessity and alignment of the helpdesk's services with Sida's priorities.
- **Effectiveness next** (EQ3) to measure whether the helpdesk delivers useful, high-quality services.
- **Coherence & Adaptiveness last** (EQ2) to assess long-term alignment with Sida's evolving policies and the helpdesk's ability to adapt.

This sequencing enhances evaluability by ensuring that the evaluation first identifies the need for helpdesk services, then assesses their performance, and finally examines strategic alignment and adaptability. The evaluation questions, judgment criteria, methods, and sources are outlined in the Evaluation Matrix below.

See evaluation matrix in Annex 3.

Limitations of the methodology

The team recognises potential methodological limitations and challenges. The table below presents these with our mitigation strategy.

Identified limitations	Proposed mitigations
Limited Direct Observation: Remote evaluations rely on secondary data and interviews instead of on-site visits, limiting direct verification of project activities and contextual factors.	Triangulation: Cross-check data from multiple sources, including reports, stakeholder interviews, and surveys. Engage independent third-party validators where possible.
Limited documentation of informal adaptations made by the helpdesk, requiring reliance on qualitative data from interviews and case studies.	By combining document reviews, case studies, and stakeholder consultations , the evaluation can effectively assess the helpdesk's ability to adapt and its fitness for future requirements.
Capacity gaps may be sensitive and require triangulation across multiple sources to ensure accuracy.	

Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement: Remote interviews and surveys may reduce engagement depth. Digital literacy, connectivity issues, and supervision concerns can limit participation.	Flexible Engagement Methods: Use multiple modes of engagement, such as phone calls, WhatsApp, and offline surveys, to increase accessibility. Build trust and ensure confidentiality for candid responses.
Time Zone and Logistical Constraints: Coordinating interviews across different time zones and availability windows can delay processes and limit stakeholder participation.	Advanced Planning: Schedule interviews well in advance and accommodate different time zones. Use asynchronous communication (email, recorded responses) when real-time interaction is challenging.
Technological Barriers: Poor internet connectivity and lack of access to digital communication tools may exclude certain stakeholders.	Digital Inclusion: Provide alternative participation options, such as telephone interviews or SMS-based surveys. Offer offline data collection for rural stakeholders.
Difficulty in Assessing Non-Verbal Communication: Virtual interactions limit observation of body language, reducing the ability to gauge emotions and stakeholder sentiments.	Supplementary Methods: Use follow-up written responses or additional interviews to clarify ambiguities. Record and review virtual sessions for deeper analysis.
Turnover of the Staff: Staff are no longer holding the same positions with Sida, UM or partner organizations.	Interview Former Staff Where Feasible: Where possible, reach out to former staff or consultants who were involved in the programme or project.

Approach and data collection

The evaluation will adopt a utilization-focused approach, as stipulated in the ToR, to ensure that findings and recommendations are actionable and directly inform decision-making for improving Sida's helpdesk services. This approach emphasizes close interaction with the intended users throughout the evaluation process, facilitating joint knowledge creation and ensuring that the evaluation aligns with Sida's strategic objectives.

The pertinent questions were incorporated into the data collection tools, specifically for the survey under Section III: Integration of Sida's Development Perspectives (Appendix 1), Section 2: Integration of Sida's Development Perspectives. This was done to capture the views of the recipients of the Help Desk services regarding the integration and promotion of Sida's Development Perspective in the work of the partners across all implementations. The following Cross-Cutting Approaches will be applied if relevant:

a. Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

The evaluation will assess how the HRBA has been integrated into services provided by the Help Desk and if possible and implementation. Specifically, it will measure:

Strengthening of Sida embassies and partners institutions through technical partnerships.
Policy advocacy efforts and research support.

b. Gender-Responsive Approach

Gender inclusivity will be applied by ensuring balanced representation of stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Moving beyond a binary gender perspective to capture a broader, intersectional understanding of gender dynamics.

The evaluation of impact on gender equality and women's empowerment will involve assessing how services provided by the Helpdesk have promoted gender equality and inclusion through their advice, research, and recommendations.

c. Human Rights Principles

The evaluation will determine whether the support provided by the Help desk has improved access to environmental justice, good governance, or any other rights-based issue (protection and access to land, clean water). This will be done by interviewing Sida's partners about the outcomes of the support.

- Participation – Ensuring affected groups are meaningfully engaged in shaping and validating findings.
- Accountability – Measuring the extent to which duty-bearers uphold commitments to human rights standards.
- Non-discrimination and Equality – Identifying disparities and structural barriers within program implementation.
- Empowerment – Assessing the program's role in enabling communities to claim their rights.
- Legality – Ensuring program alignment with international human rights norms.

Box 1: Integration of Sida's Development Perspectives

The evaluation will integrate Sida's five development perspectives into its design and implementation:

1. Poor People's Perspective: The evaluation will assess the extent to which the Helpdesk has supported the integration of environmental and climate considerations in projects targeting marginalized groups. For example, it will examine how the Helpdesk has contributed to ensuring that environmental strategies address the needs of communities most affected by climate change.
2. Gender Equality: The evaluation will explore whether the Helpdesk's advice and tools have supported gender-sensitive programming. For instance, it will analyse whether the Helpdesk has guided Sida staff in integrating climate-related gender risks into project designs or facilitated capacity-building sessions to strengthen gender-responsive environmental policies.
3. Human Rights: The evaluation will assess whether the Helpdesk's outputs align with international human rights standards. For example, it will evaluate whether the tools and methods provided by the Helpdesk promote equitable access to environmental benefits for all, including vulnerable populations.
4. Conflict Sensitivity: The evaluation will determine whether the Helpdesk has incorporated conflict sensitivity in its advice. For example, it will review whether the Helpdesk has guided Sida staff in designing projects that avoid exacerbating tensions over natural resources, such as land or water, in fragile regions.
5. Environmental and Climate Impact: The evaluation will examine whether the Helpdesk has effectively supported the integration of environmental assessments into Sida-funded projects. For instance, it will review whether the Helpdesk has provided actionable advice for incorporating climate resilience measures into infrastructure projects or biodiversity preservation programs.

Data collection

Document review

The evaluator conducted document review that included Sida's policies and guidelines, helpdesk deliverables, reports and previous evaluations or reviews (See Appendix 6). This will establish the contextual and operational framework for assessing the helpdesk's performance. This evaluation will primarily use qualitative data drawing on the participative approach. Yet, the analysis will also include quantitative data provided by the Help Desk. The capitalisation of existing knowledge and information will be based on primary data collection methods, including structured and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data will be collected from documents, reports, and studies. The information collected from

the different sources will be aggregated and analysed. A synthesis of the findings will be prepared and shared in the evaluation report.

Stakeholder Interviews and Sample Size

The sample size for data collection through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) consists of 61 individuals (Appendix 7). This sample includes Sida staff, embassy representatives, Helpdesk experts, thematic specialists, and external stakeholders engaged in Sida-funded projects. The selection ensures comprehensive coverage of key areas, including programmatic oversight, policy implementation, environmental integration, and sector-specific expertise. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups enhances the opportunity for triangulation of findings, providing a holistic understanding of the Helpdesk's role, effectiveness, and challenges. Given the strategic relevance of these informants, the KIIs will serve as a critical data source for validating and refining the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations.

Survey

An electronic survey will be developed to gather quantitative feedback from a broad range of stakeholders (Appendix 1: Evaluation Tools). The survey questions will be carefully crafted to align with the evaluation dimensions, including relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness. To achieve a respectable response rate of 50%, the survey will be concise, well-designed, and focused on collecting actionable, quantifiable data. The questions will primarily feature multiple choice and rating-scale formats, ensuring simplicity and ease of response. A successful survey depends on securing valid email addresses for the target audience, as this is essential for effective distribution. Survey results will be triangulated with interviews and secondary data (evaluation reports, progress reports, online feedback) for a thorough analysis. If the survey yields an insufficient number of responses, the evaluator will relaunch it to enhance participation and data reliability.

Ethical considerations

The Evaluation will conform to Sida's ethical guidelines and principles of integrity, accountability, respect, and beneficence throughout the evaluation process. Thus, the evaluation team will be responsible for safeguarding ethics at all stages of the evaluation cycle and for ensuring a participatory approach, which includes ensuring the informed consent of interviewees, protecting privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring fair selection of participants, and ensuring that the evaluation results do no harm to participants or their communities by adhering to ethical standards of the evaluation.

Table 1: Potential ethical issues and safeguards

Phases	Ethical issues / Risks	Safeguards
Inception/reporting	Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection	No individual will be named as the source of any information or opinion. The ET is General Data Protection Regulation compliant, will respect the confidentiality of all data and information received, and will take thorough precautions to prevent any unauthorized persons from accessing them.
Data collection	Rights of participants, avoidance of harm, anonymity and confidentiality	Participants will be informed of their rights to voluntary, confidential, and anonymous participation, with the option to withdraw anytime. The ET will emphasize its neutrality, encouraging candid feedback on the project.
Data analysis/ Dissemination	Honesty and integrity	The ET commits to accurately present procedures, data and findings in the reports. The validity of data and findings will be tested using multiple methods and data sources, allowing for triangulation. This approach will avoid bias.

Milestones and deliverables

The evaluation will include the following milestones (see more details in Section 6 Work Plan):

What	Who	When (2025) (from ToR)	NIRAS suggestion (updated 17.03.2025)
Start of the evaluation	Sida and Evaluators	Week 2, January (w/b January 13)	Week 8 (w/b February 17) Suggested date for start-up meeting: Feb 20 or Feb 21
Submission of the draft inception report	Evaluators	Week 4, January (w/b January 27)	March 17
Comments on draft inception report	Sida & stakeholders	Week 2, February (w/b February 10)	March 25
Inception workshop	Sida, Evaluators, stakeholders	Week 3, February (February 13)	Friday March 28
Submission of the final inception report	Evaluators	Week 4, February (w/b February 24)	April 2
Approval of the inception report	Sida	Week 4, February (w/b February 24)	By April 4
Data collection phase (interviews, surveys, etc.)	Evaluators (stakeholders)	March 2025 (entire month)	Mid April – Mid May 2025
Debriefing session	Sida, Evaluators	Week 2, March (March 15)	TBD
Validation workshop	Sida, Evaluators	Week 4, March (March 31)	TBD
Submission of the draft evaluation report	Evaluators	Week 1, April (April 7)	May 23
Comments on the draft report	Sida & stakeholders	Week 3, April (April 14)	May 30
Submission of the final report	Evaluators	Week 4, April (April 22)	Jun 6
Approval of Final report		<u>Not included in ToR</u>	By June 13
Dissemination seminar (Stockholm & virtual)	Sida & Evaluators	End of April (April 30)	Week 25 (w/b June 16)

Work plan

2025	BG	NK	QA	January					February				March				April				May				June					
Inception Phase																														
Start-up meeting - Feb 21	0.50	0.25																												
Desk review and methods development	2																													
Drafting inception report	2	0.5																												
QA inception report March 14			1																											
Submission of draft inception report March 17																														
Comments/no-objection sent by Stakeholders March 25																														
Inception meeting (virtual) - March 28	0.5	0.25																												
Revision of inception report based on comments	1	0.5																												
Submission of final inception report																														
Approval of inception report																														
Sub-total, inception phase:	6.0	1.5	1																											
Data Collection Phase																														
Preparations	1																													
Remote key information interviews (online/telephone)	7	1																												
Additional desk review	2	1																												
Debriefing/validation workshop and possibly validation workshop for joint knowledge creation (TBD)	0.5	0.5																												
Sub-total, data collection:	10.5	2.5	0																											
Data Analysis and Reporting Phase																														
Analysis and Report writing	7	1.5																												
QA draft report			1																											
Submission of draft evaluation report May 23																														
Feedback from stakeholders on draft report May 30																														
Finalisation of the report	2	0.5																												
Submission of final evaluation report June 6																														
Evaluation seminar (virtual) TBD	0.5																													
Sub-total, analysis and reporting:	9.5	2	1																											
Total days	26.0	6.0	2.0																											

Initials: BG= Bunafsha Gulakova; NK = Nora Kokanova; QA= Quality Assurance



Evaluation of Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change 2022-2025

Purpose and Use

This evaluation assessed Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change covering January 2022 – June 2025, to inform strategic decisions on its mandate, use, and institutional relevance.

Conclusion

The Helpdesk remains a relevant, credible, and valued support for Sida staff, providing timely, technically sound advice that informs project design, strategic planning, and thematic analysis. It contributes to cross-sector coherence through collaboration with other Helpdesks, though such cooperation is

sporadic. Its adaptability is evident in emerging areas such as environmental justice, solid waste, and safeguards. Yet institutionalization and internal visibility remain limited. To stay fit for purpose, the Helpdesk must evolve its mandate, broaden expertise, and strengthen its internal visibility.

Recommendation

Sida should enhance visibility, expand cross-sectoral use, and strengthen follow-up on uptake and results of collaboration with other helpdesks. The Helpdesk should institutionalize collaboration, integrate environmental justice, and broaden its expert pool while maintaining coordination capacity.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Visiting address: Rissneleden 110, 174 57 Sundbyberg
Postal address: Box 2025, SE-174 02 Sundbyberg, Sweden
Telephone: +46 [0]8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 [0]8-20 88 64
E-mail: sida@sida.se Web: sida.se/en

