

Normative dialogue addresses Swedish values and priorities and is part of Sida's global advocacy work to get better development results to reduce poverty and promote a human rights based approach, gender equality, conflict prevention and the integration of the environment and climate change perspective. This brief is an example of a normative dialogue on environment and climate change between Sida and Act CoS.

BACKGROUND

Act CoS¹ provides humanitarian and development support and is active in policy dialogue and church cooperation. Historically and increasingly with the climate crisis, climate justice and solidarity with affected communities hold great importance to Act CoS. Act CoS has a long track record of support to livelihood interventions by local partners in the agriculture sector, including ecological farming methods, and to resilience to climate change.

There is a long collaboration between Sida and Act CoS. This example underlines the importance of a joint understanding of environment and climate change for sustainable development for long term results.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DIALOGUE

In 2017 and in view of a new contribution agreement, the dialogue on environment and climate change deepened between Sida and Act CoS. At the time, Act CoS had an environment certification scheme² in place while a wider take *including partners* was missing. This gap was among others due to an organizational restructuring with a gap of thematic expertise and support functions for partner interaction.

The Sida-Act CoS dialogue on environment and climate change has been systematized and supported by, but not limited to, dialogue questions included in the appraisal phase, used in the continuous communication, yearly reporting by Act CoS and joint review sessions. Sida has also commissioned Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change³ (The Helpdesk) to provide dialogue support as needed to Act CoS. This support runs over time with methodology, means and frequency guided by the needs of Act CoS and its partners.

A landmark was a joint Sida and Act CoS exercise in 2017, a so called spot check⁴. It connected policy and operations, was a mutual learning process and functioned as a tool for Sida's understanding of Act CoS's work with environmental integration and beyond. The Helpdesk assisted Sida and Act CoS with the exercise that included dialogue sessions on environmental issues with staff across the organisation, as well as with partners and rights holders.

These occasions created an enabling environment for Act CoS and its partners to share their experiences, recognition of interrelations between poverty, environmental degradation and climate change impacts and how they address the issues in interventions. The dialogue focused on actions that could further strengthen the "why, what and how" in the work. The outcomes and Sida recommendations fed into Act CoS's undertaking of an Environment and Climate Change Impact Assessment of country projects and programmes. Sida and the Helpdesk acted as sounding boards in the process.

1 In May 2019 the international branch of Church of Sweden was renamed Act Church of Sweden. It is a member of the Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance. <https://actalliance.org>

2 It refers to organisational environmental impacts such as office environment, energy, procurement, travels etc.

3 <https://www.sidaenvironmenthelpdesk.se>

4 A spot check is a tool used by the Sida Civil Society Unit in the capacity assessments of the SPOs and their operations and is important for mutual learning and improvement, generating good examples and lessons learned.



HIV drama group growing drought resistant vegetables, Hope Alive project, Lutheran World Federation, Kitgum District, Uganda. Photo: Lisa Matteses Åhrgren

Sida and the Helpdesk assisted Act CoS with capacity building and dialogue sessions at an Act CoS annual meeting, involving all staff. Further, Sida-facilitated meetings involving all Sida's partner organisations on the same theme created a broader platform exchange in which Act CoS shared values, practical experiences, challenges and solutions on environmental aspects in development.

MAIN RESULTS

The normative dialogue has contributed to a series of results advancing the Swedish environment and climate change perspective, especially in relation to *Act CoS' partners*. Through the continuous Sida-Act CoS exchange, the spot check and Helpdesk dialogue support and meetings, ActCoS identified that a greater systematic and strategic approach was needed encompassing partners. Thus, the described means acted as catalysts for Act CoS to address the strategic, policy and operational level *together* with partners

for elevating positive impacts and reducing negative impacts and external risks related to environment and climate. A concrete result is the acquired systematic knowledge about contextual risks and opportunities. A new tool for planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting for partners has also shown that there is a higher engagement in environment and climate change related activities than revealed in earlier documentation. An effect of the initial dialogue between Sida and Act CoS is also evident through requests from partners for capacity strengthening to deepening impact assessments and developing more adequate interventions.

Overall, Act CoS is an important actor among Swedish actors and internationally, exemplified with its engagement in the Swedish Gender and Environment Network (GeMiNi) and CONCORD, involvement in the EU debate on climate finance and being vocal at climate meetings (UNFCCC) and across the Act Alliance. This spirit has fed into the Sida-Act CoS dialogue. The other way around, Sida has brought knowledge, an approach and a network that benefitted Act CoS. This symbiosis has a nurturing value for the overall advocacy and enabling environment for dialogue, bringing other actors on board.

KEY TAKE AWAYS, IDENTIFIED BY SIDA AND ACT CoS

- Engaged staff at both ends, understanding of specific contexts and values of a partner and being consistent in the key messaging are central components for successful dialogue.
- The continuity plays a key role – not only to constantly ask questions and follow up but to contribute with support, with a solution-oriented approach.
- Overall, to enhance impact it is of importance that advocacy of Swedish priorities is made with a holistic approach, stressing on the interdependency among the perspectives that mutually reinforce one another.

For more information contact [Ulrika Åkesson, ulrika.akesson@sida.se](mailto:ulrika.akesson@sida.se) or [Maria Liungman, maria.liungman@sida.se](mailto:maria.liungman@sida.se)