

The perspectives of people living in poverty on development¹ is an overarching perspective in Sweden's development cooperation. This means that the needs, interests and preconditions of women and men, boys and girls living in poverty should be a point of departure for all that Sida does – analysis, interventions, and dialogue. To realise this ambition, we need to listen to what women and men, girls and boys, living in poverty express themselves. This brief explains how a multidimensional poverty analysis (MDPA) can integrate the perspectives of people living in poverty on development, and presents different methods for how to listen to people living in poverty.

SIDA'S APPROACH TO MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY

Sida's framework for multidimensional poverty helps us understand **who** are poor, **how** poverty is experienced, and **why** this situation has come about, as well as **risks** for increased poverty and who is at risk.



Source: Sida (2017) Dimensions of Poverty – Sida's Conceptual Framework.

¹ Sometimes referred to as *poor people's perspective*. In this brief, we use the version "the perspectives of people living in poverty on development" throughout.

Sida recognises four dimensions of poverty: resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice, and human security and understands the development context in four aspects: the environment context, the political and institutional context, the economic and social context and the conflict/peaceful context. It builds on and integrates the five perspectives² decided by the Swedish Government to encompass all Swedish development cooperation, including the perspectives of people living in poverty on development.

The purpose of this brief is to explain the perspective and give guidance on what it means to have the perspectives of people living in poverty on development as a starting point – not least when analysing multidimensional poverty – as well as give examples of how we can listen to their voices.

The brief can be helpful when analysing multidimensional poverty, when assessing the relevance of a contribution, or to guide an evaluation. It can also be helpful in policy dialogue on the importance of building development and development cooperation on the perspectives of women and men, girls and boys living in poverty.

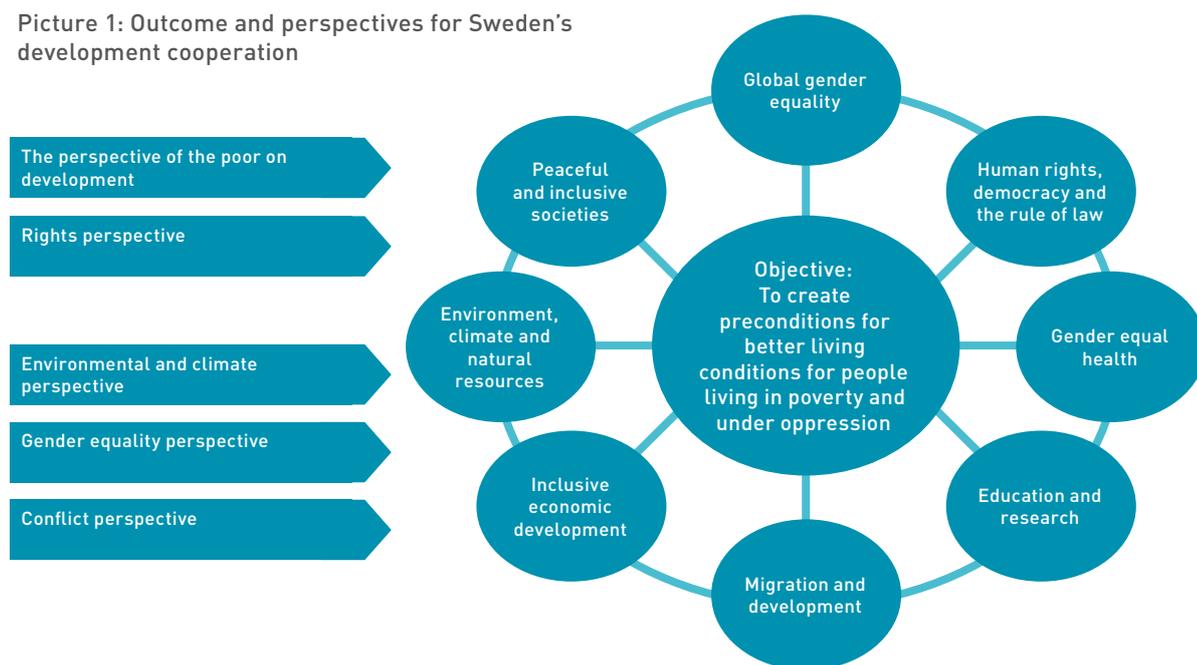
THE PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY ON DEVELOPMENT – A PREREQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

At Sida, we often talk about "the poverty perspective", as if poverty was a perspective at par with the five perspectives (see picture 1 below). It is not. **To create preconditions for poverty reduction is the overarching objective³ for Sweden's international aid.** And in order to reach that goal, we need to apply the **perspectives of people living in poverty on development**, as well as the other four perspectives.

² The perspectives of people living in poverty on development, the rights perspective, the environment and climate perspective, the gender equality perspective and the conflict perspective.

³ The objective, decided by the Swedish parliament, reads to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression.

Picture 1: Outcome and perspectives for Sweden's development cooperation



These are thus two different concepts – that need to be kept in mind and applied at the same time.

The perspectives of people living in poverty on development

In 2003, when deciding on Sweden's Policy for Global Development, the **Swedish Parliament** noted that "the needs, interests and preconditions of people living in poverty should be a starting point for the strive towards a just and sustainable development" and that "Sweden's policy should to a greater extent be based on the realities, experiences and priorities of people living in poverty."

The two overarching perspectives – the rights perspective and the perspectives of people living in poverty on development – were decided by the Swedish Parliament in 2003. They were recently reaffirmed by the Parliament as the basis for all Sweden's efforts under Agenda 2030 to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, and are seen as the main vehicle for the Leave No one Behind Agenda.⁴

Sweden's development cooperation should take these two perspectives as a point of departure and be characterised by them, and they should be analysed and integrated throughout Swedish development cooperation. This is described in Sida's [instruction](#), as well as in the [Guidelines for strategies in Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance](#).

Why do we write "the perspectives" (plural)? Simply because it is not one perspective. The perspectives of people living in poverty are as varying as the perspectives of any people. Each person has her or his own perspective on development and the interests, needs and preconditions will vary according to a myriad of aspects – age, religious orientation, back-ground, gender, age, etcetera. We cannot – and should not – adapt our work to each of these perspectives, but we should let our activities be informed by them, on an aggregate level.

TO TAKE THE PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY ON DEVELOPMENT AS A STARTING POINT

What does it mean for our operations and for our analysis to be characterised by and take the perspectives of people living in poverty on development as a starting point?

There are many things that influence our development cooperation. The strategies that steer our cooperation. Corruption considerations. Our thematic priorities and comparative advantages in relation to other development partners. How we analyse and understand the situation.

The perspectives of people living in poverty on development adds another aspect – that we need to truly understand the different realities and situations of people living in poverty and start our analysis and

⁴ The Swedish government has developed [an approach to the Leave No One Behind agenda](#)

programming from there. We need to put ourselves in the shoes of our target groups, see the situation with their eyes, and really try to understand what they value and prioritise. And let this guide our analysis and programming. This is the true meaning of the perspectives of people living in poverty on development.

But we shouldn't stop there. Of course we also need to add our understanding of causalities, of risks, of the development process, of what works to inform our analysis and programming. But if we do not make that first crucial step – to put the persons living in poverty at the centre and understand their needs – we risk drawing conclusions and investing in solutions that will not be sustainable, and that will not respond to the diverse needs of women and men, girls and boys living in poverty.

In order for this to happen, people living in poverty must have the opportunity to express these needs, priorities and preconditions to their elected representatives, to the organisations that design and implement activities aiming at improving their lives – but also to us, as Sida.

Applying the perspectives of people living in poverty on development in contribution management

When **assessing a contribution**, the Rule for Managing Contributions instructs Sida to "within each contribution, consider the Perspectives of development cooperation as stated in Sida's Instruction." You are thus required to assess whether your partner has applied the perspectives of people living in poverty on development in developing their activities, and whether they will apply it during implementation and follow-up. In TRAC, you assess this as part of the rights perspective (the human rights based approach).

At the **monitoring stage** you can have more or less structured conversations with the beneficiaries of the contribution during field visits (see below, the guidance on talking with people living in poverty). Also see how well the reports from the partner reflect participatory monitoring, if that was part of the project proposal. Who is participating? Who is not?

There are **evaluation methods** that allow for greater participation of the beneficiaries of the contributions. Please see the evaluation guidance in the [poverty toolbox](#).

Applying the perspectives of people living in poverty on development in the analysis of multidimensional poverty

While Sida requests our partners to apply the perspective of people living in poverty in the contributions – in the analysis this is Sida's responsibility. Several of Sida's multidimensional poverty analysis processes have started with a joint field visit with meetings with women and men, girls and boys. One example is the Zambian MDPA, that took as its point of departure the life of a Zambian woman living in poverty – her deprivations and lack of rights but also her dreams, hope and agency.

Analysing multidimensional poverty is often characterised by long discussions within the team, searching for sources with the relevant information, workshops and sometimes also consultations with partners. But those that we analyse, those whose living conditions we try to understand and whose living conditions we are assigned to contribute to, they are seldom present in the analysis. except in the form of numbers, deprivations, tables. But can we really understand poverty without listening to how women and men, girls and boys living in different forms of poverty describe their lives, their needs, their situation?

Sida's [Poverty Toolbox](#) provides tools for the analysis of multidimensional poverty and making use of the conclusions of the analysis in the strategy cycle and in contribution management. The guiding questions remind you about the need to also include the perspectives of people living in poverty on development in the analysis – what do they see as their main deprivations or needs, what risks do they identify, and how do they look upon the context?

Strive to include what people living in poverty say themselves in the analysis of each dimension of poverty. This does probably not give you the full picture, but it complements the analysis of data and numbers and can shed light on intersecting deprivations and make you and the readers of the MDPA understand what poverty feels like and how poverty manifests itself in your context. Listening to what women and men, girls and boys living in poverty can tell you about the political system, the situation for own account workers in urban areas or landless casual labourers and how they perceive the security situation does not represent an unbiased truth but contributes to your understanding of the context that poor people live and act in.

HOW CAN SIDA LISTEN TO PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY?

Sida has experience of different methods to listen to people living in poverty.

Using the literature

Qualitative studies (often sociological or anthropological) are important contributors of information on the lives of people living in poverty. They can contain life stories, quotes and similar material that adds to your knowledge.

Talking with people living in poverty

Field visits are important opportunities to meet people and discuss what poverty means to them. Poverty has a different face for each individual, depending on a lot of factors – age, gender, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, it is important to understand that listening to one or two voices adds to your understanding of poverty – but does not provide the full picture. You could ask questions about community leadership, the quality of the children’s school, or the main problems in the community and if these have changed recently, if the situation of the household has changed lately and if so how and why. What a person says is what s/he is prepared to share with you, and is representative for this person only. But it still adds to your understanding of what poverty means.

Reality checks

The **Reality Check Approach (RCA)** is a qualitative research approach involving RCA trained researchers living with people in their own homes and sharing their everyday lives. The intention is to have unmediated conversations, observations, and experiences with people (in their own space and time) as they go about their daily lives.⁵

It was pioneered within Sida by the team working in Bangladesh. In 2014, an evaluation was commissioned⁶ with important lessons learnt for future design of such an effort: *“The RC study has produced plausible, credible and valuable understanding of the experience of people living in poverty and the challenges that they face in accessing health and education public services. The study has been seen to be highly relevant. Its effectiveness and impact have been more mixed, although there are some very positive outcomes.”*

In Mocambique, Sida contracted a team of consultants to assess poverty and well-being through the perspectives of local communities/ the poor, enhance knowledge on qualitative aspects of poverty dynamics and the relevance and quality of public services in Mozambique, and provide Sweden with relevant qualitative data for further implementation of its programme in Niassa. Information about this approach can be found [here](#).

WHAT PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY EXPRESS ABOUT THEIR LIVES

In this section we give some examples of how people living in poverty express their needs, interests and preconditions. The examples mainly come from [Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us](#)⁷, a twenty year old report whose messages are as relevant today as they were when they were captured, and from Sida’s reality checks in Mozambique.⁸ These examples should not replace the actual voices of people living in poverty in your context, but rather be seen as an inspiration.

The perspectives of people living in poverty on the dimensions of poverty

The four dimensions of poverty (resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice and human security) are interlinked in complex ways, where deprivations in one dimension impacts on other dimensions. This is often how people living in poverty describe their situation – as interlinkages between lack of resources, lack of choices, no way of influencing decisions taken in their community, and insecurity.



⁵ <http://www.reality-check-approach.com/what-is-rca.html>

⁶ [Evaluation of the Reality Check Approach in Bangladesh](#), Sida Decentralised Evaluation, 2014:8.

⁷ Deepa Narayan, et al, World Bank, 2000

⁸ <https://www.fcgsueden.se/projects/reality-checks-in-mozambique>

RESOURCES

Resources

Being poor in terms of resources means not possessing, having access to or power over resources that can be used to sustain a life in dignity and improve one's life. Resources can be both material and nonmaterial – e.g. a decent income, capital, being educated or trained, professional skills, being healthy.

- I sold my land and now I have nothing. I can never buy my land back because the prices go up every year. (Tanzania)

- After one poor crop, we need three good harvests to return to normal. (Vietnam)

- What benefit do I have from the fact that there is everything in town? You see things, but do not have money for anything. If I would live in a village I would be happy. If I had one small piece of land I would plant things, breed cattle and say good-bye to poverty. (Macedonia)

- [It is a big problem that] people in the community drink water from open wells, and many become ill. People use the lake to bath as well as to drink – which is dangerous and make people sick particularly at the onset of the rainy season [when there is less movement of the water]. Cholera may come back. (Mocambique)

- If I had gone to school, I would have got a job and I would have obtained a husband who has a salaried job. (Uganda)

- Ten years ago we harvested ten sacks of cassava and eight sacks of maize per acre. Today because of decline of soil fertility and rain and because we do not use fertilizer or improved seed, some of us get three or four sacks of maize while others harvest nothing. (Tanzania)

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICE

Opportunities & choice

Being poor in terms of opportunities and choice concerns what possibility you have to develop and or use your resources so as to move out of poverty. Access to e.g. social services, infrastructure, capital, land, or natural resources affects the opportunities and choices.

- The poor are the ones who can be sick today and be dead the next day (Afghanistan)⁹

- There is only one nurse who has to be available 24 hours, and often he is so tired that he doesn't attend to the patients in a good way. Also the midwife works a lot, but as she is tired and young people do not trust [her] and prefer to go to traditional midwives. (Mocambique)

- People are not attended to and often have to wait for a long time, with this being the only hospital in the neighborhood. (Mocambique)

- We are all poor here, because we have no school and no health center. If a woman has a difficult delivery, a traditional cloth is tied between two sticks and we carry her for 7 km to the health center. You know how long it takes to walk like that? There is nobody who can help here, that's why we are all poor here. (Togo)

- Most families in my village cannot afford to send their children to the nearby town to study after grade 7 and pay for housing, food, uniforms and school materials. To finish 12th grade, these payments will last for five years. If we could only have a school up to 10th grade, many more children would finish secondary school. (Mocambique)

- The most important asset is ... an extended and well-placed family network from which one can derive jobs, credit, and financial assistance. (Senegal)

- Getting a job has nothing to do with what you learn in school. (Uganda)

- If you don't have money today, your disease will lead you to your grave. (Ghana)

- Why should I study, I know how to add and count, I can count money, rip people off, and cheat on weighing. Nobody is paying me to study, but I make 15-20 lari a month from trade. (A 10-year-old businessman, Georgia)

- Disabled children are not seen as human beings; they are isolated at home and not sent to school. (Uganda)

- In rural districts, especially when parents are intimidated by the city, or are not Georgian-speaking, they

⁹ Groupe URD, [Research on Chronically Poor Women in Afghanistan, 2008](#)

hesitate to seek medical treatment. They don't know where to take their children, and are afraid they cannot afford treatment. (Georgia)

- Most of the drop-outs are found among the indigenous people — if they ever start school. (Vietnam)

POWER AND VOICE

Power & voice

Being poor in terms of power and voice relates to the ability of people to articulate their concerns, needs and rights in an informed way, and to take part in decision-making that relate to these concerns. Power is a relational concept that allows us to better understand socio-cultural hierarchies and relations of which gender is one, others include age, caste, class, religion, ethnicity and sexual identity. Reinforcing forms of discrimination based on such socio-cultural relations may increase an individual's poverty in this sense.

- Everybody is allowed to voice their opinion. In many cases, I'm cut off while I am voicing my opinion (a poor woman, South Africa)

- After the community had finished drawing its village social map, we wanted to know what future aspirations the community had. One participant proposed that something be done about the poor situation of the Batwa (a minority group). At this point it emerged that none of the [Batwa] had had their households included on the village map. Worse, not a single person from this small ethnic group had turned up for the meeting. A separate effort was made by the research team to interview some Batwa families. Two women were found in the neighborhood. One summed it up for us thus: 'We only gain value in the eyes of the Bafumbira (the majority group) when we are working their gardens. In other instances we are invisible'. (Uganda)

- Not every disabled person can afford the procedures to qualify for disability payments. (Moldova)

- When disputes arise between neighbours, there are few legal channels by which to resolve them. (Moldova)

- It is difficult to get to the court. It costs R10 return by taxi from the farm to Patensie, and then R 3.50 from Patensie to Hankey (South Africa).

HUMAN SECURITY

Human security

Being poor in terms of human security implies that violence and insecurity are constraints to different groups' and individuals' possibilities to exercise their human rights and to find paths out of poverty.

- We live in constant insecurity — the local thugs have an easy time of it when they know a woman is living alone" (Gabon).

- I didn't like the school because there were troublemakers, and the teacher hated me and hit me. (El Salvador)

- After each bombardment I lost 2 or 3 kilos. I became very anxious and we all suffered from high blood pressure. (Armenian Refugee, Armenia)

- Respect is lost, if someone wants to do something... always someone steals the money. (Panama)

- I wish I had died rather than become an IDP. (Female Azerbaijani IDP, Azerbaijan 1997)

- I did not continue to attend secondary school in Struga because I had to travel everyday by bus. Many boys would tease me, and people in the village would talk about me — look at her, alone in a bus or in a van — and that is why I do not want to go (Macedonia)

- In all communities, wife-beating was perceived as a common experience in daily life. (Jamaica)

- Only refugees and IDPs receive humanitarian aid while we have to sell our goods. I have a negative attitude towards IDPs (Azerbaijan).

The perspectives of people living in poverty on the development context



Listening to how people living in poverty experience the development context adds value to the analysis of it. It can pinpoint specific problems of certain groups.

Economic and social context

The economic and social context covers the size and growth rate of the economy, the key macroeconomic variables, fiscal policy, structure of the economy and exports, use and dependence on natural resources, education system, health system and demographic developments.

- We keep hearing about monies that the government allocates for projects, and nothing happens on the ground. (South Africa)

Peaceful/conflict context

The peace and conflict context refers to factors such as social cohesion, trust, conflict resolution mechanisms, justice, and arms control on the one hand and violence, tensions, grievances and conflicting interests on the other.

- Many said that relief should be channelled directly to them and not through local government (Bangladesh).

Environment context

The environmental context includes the need to understand the environmental situation, trends and consequences in the country of region – e.g. climate change, loss of biodiversity and ecosystems services, pollution, water quality – and the causes and drivers of degradation.

- Three years ago it was a very bad year. The flood washed away all of our crops, and there was a lot of hunger around here, to the point that many people actually died of hunger. They must have been at least a dozen, mostly children and old people. Nobody could help them. Their relatives in the village had no food either; nobody had enough food for his own children, let alone for the children of his brother or cousin. And few had a richer relative somewhere else who could help. (Benin)

- Little by little the environment is dying and people don't understand that the problem comes from the fact that man is killing the environment. (Guatemala)

Political and institutional context

The political and institutional context refers to the formal and informal political institutions, norms, rule of law and human rights.

- The most important strategy for finding either public or private employment is to use one's "connections" and pay a bribe. (Georgia)

- In all regions of the study, participants expressed a feeling of distrust and betrayal by the government. This can most clearly be seen in the South, where only 12 percent of the participants were in favor of the government. In their opinion, the government is not only guardian of their rights but it is also there to assist them during difficult times and in their fight against poverty. However, the remaining 88 percent unanimously expressed distrust towards the government, its representatives, institutions and administration. Sixty-seven percent perceived the government as permeated with corruption. Some complained about the attitude of the government, its indifference towards their concerns and problems. (Madagascar)

- The state steals from us all the time so deceiving the state is not a sin. (Ukraine)

- L'etat est absent — the state is simply absent from peoples' lives and strategies for securing their needs. (Madagascar)

TOOLS AND METHODS

Reality check approach

<http://www.reality-check-approach.com/what-is-rca.html>

[Evaluation of the Reality Check Approach in Bangladesh](#)

<https://www.fcg.fi/en/projects/reality-checks-mozambique>

Literature

[Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us](#)

Regional perception surveys that contain voices of the population, not necessarily only people living in poverty exist for many of Sida's regions (Afrobarometer, <https://afrobarometer.org/>, Latinobarometer, <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp> etc).