

This report synthesises findings from the “Evaluation of Sida’s Work with Poverty”, conducted between August 2023 and June 2026. The evaluation assesses how evidence is generated and used within Sida’s contribution management, and how this shapes the agency’s ability to achieve and demonstrate development impact.

Sida’s work is grounded in a Multidimensional Poverty Approach (MDPA), recognising poverty as encompassing deprivations in resources, power and voice, opportunities and choice, and human security. Within this overall framework the evaluation addresses a central question: how Sida can improve its effectiveness in contributing to sustainable poverty reduction.

The evidence we focus on here relates to effectiveness, cost-effectiveness/efficiency and on “what works”, and less on “what to do” (e.g. relevance, composition of portfolio etc.).

## EVALUATION METHOD

The evaluation is based on eight impact studies conducted by the evaluation team, four from Zambia (a relatively stable development context) and four from South Sudan (a fragile context),<sup>1</sup> a synthesis review of 18 additional Sida evaluations conducted between 2018 and 2025, a Sida staff survey (with 221 respondents), interviews with Sida staff at headquarter (HQ) and embassies, and an academic paper (developed by the evaluation team) on wider international experiences and trends related to evaluation of development impact. While Zambia and South Sudan were focus countries for the impact case studies, the overall geographical scope of the assignment has been global. Although many positive experiences have been reported, focus has been on identifying critical shortcomings, and the learning from these, to inform Sida’s future work.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Sida delivers important but uneven results:**

Across Zambia and South Sudan, Sida-supported programmes generate tangible benefits for poor populations, including improved incomes, food security, and access to essential services. However, these results are often partial, fragile, and insufficient to drive systemic change. In Zambia, interventions perform better as the systems are relatively stable but remain limited in scale and transformative impact. In South Sudan, contributions help sustain basic services

under extreme conditions, but outcomes are difficult to verify and sustain and the efforts to build state capacity has fallen short of expectations.

### **Impact is constrained by design and evidence gaps:**

A consistent finding is that programme ambitions often exceed what design, context, and evidence systems can support. Interventions frequently combine multiple objectives without clearly specifying causal pathways or conditions for success. This leads to diffuse programme logic, limited focus, and challenges in both delivery and evaluation.

**Evidence is available but underused:** The evaluation finds that the core challenge is not a lack of evidence, but insufficient integration of evidence into decision-making. Analytical inputs - such as studies, evaluations, and sector analyses - are often available but only partially translated into concrete design choices. Programme design is frequently shaped more by strong development narratives than by context-specific empirical evidence.

### **Weak evaluability limits learning and accountability:**

Most programmes are not designed with evaluation in mind. Baseline data (disaggregated), clear theories of change (ToCs), outcome indicators, and comparison frameworks are often missing or misaligned. As a result, impact assessments often rely on reconstruction rather than programme-generated data, limiting the credibility and usefulness of findings, and increasing evaluation costs.

<sup>1</sup> All eight impact studies have been published on Sida’s website.

### Monitoring systems prioritise reporting over learning:

Monitoring systems across Sida's portfolio are generally effective in tracking activities and outputs, but weak in capturing outcomes (such as behavioural change and systemic effects). Heavy reliance on partner-reported data, limited triangulation, and insufficient use of national data systems create a verification gap and constrain deeper analysis.

### Organisational factors reinforce underuse of evidence:

The underuse of evidence reflects systemic organisational dynamics, including: i) Strong pressure to deliver and disburse funds; ii) Limited incentives for evidence-based adaptation; iii) Strong reliance on partner data and internal experience; iv) Limited tools for translating evidence into decisions; and v) Lack of explicit requirements for evaluability in design. Together, these factors mean that evidence often plays a supporting rather than guiding role in contribution management.

## CONCLUSION

Sida demonstrates a clear ability to deliver development results. However, the strength, credibility, and sustainability of these results vary significantly. Weak integration of evidence into programming contribute to this.

The primary challenge is not generating more evidence, but ensuring that existing evidence systematically informs programme design, implementation, and adaptation. Without stronger integration of evidence, programmes risk remaining over-ambitious, insufficiently targeted, and difficult to evaluate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen its contribution to poverty reduction, Sida should prioritise three mutually reinforcing changes:

### Embed evaluability and evidence in programme design:

i) Treat evaluability as a core requirement from the outset; ii) Develop clear ToCs with testable assumptions; and iii) Align indicators and data systems with intended outcomes.

### Strengthen evidence quality and usability:

i) Systematically triangulate partner data with independent sources; ii) Improve access to and use of national and administrative data; and iii) Develop practical tools for staff to translate evidence into decision-making.

### Align organisational incentives with evidence use:

i) Introduce clearer requirements for evidence-based design and adaptation; ii) Create space for reflection and learning within programme cycles; and iii) Strengthen focus on effectiveness, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.

Overall, improving Sida's impact requires shifting evidence from mainly a reporting tool towards a central driver of decision-making - ensuring that programmes are realistic, focused, and capable of delivering sustained and verifiable change for people living in poverty.

This is a summary of the evaluation:

#### Sidas work with poverty (2026:1k)

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