

## Dollars, Dialogue and Development

### Background

Whilst most aid is intended to finance specific undertakings – such as rehabilitating a hospital, constructing a feeder road or providing expert assistance to the Ministry of Finance – a significant proportion of the aid programme is not linked to specific projects. Such aid is called *programme aid* (PA), which is associated with achieving economic growth, often through the intermediate objective of supporting reforms. There are three different modalities of PA: import support and debt relief, together known as balance of payments support, and budget support.<sup>1</sup> Three major actors are involved in Swedish PA: Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who disburse PA, and the Ministry of Finance who handles the contacts with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

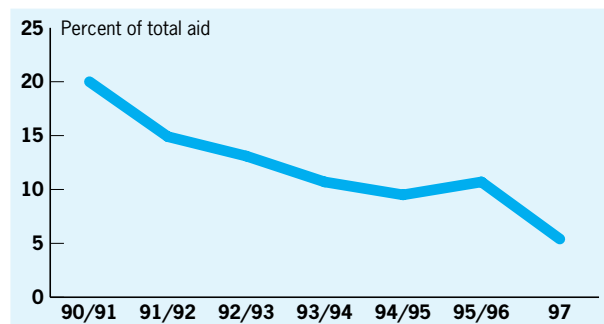
Does Swedish debt relief contribute to economic growth? Does economic growth reach the poor? Does Sweden influence policies in partner countries? Have donors supported the “right” reforms? These are some of the questions discussed in the evaluation presented here of *programme aid*. Programme aid is aid not targeted to finance a specific project. Its modalities are import support, debt relief and budget support, and the inputs are foreign exchange and dialogue.

During the 1990s, Sweden disbursed over SEK 7 billion of PA, equivalent to 12 per cent of the total aid budget. Three substantial changes took place during the last decade:

- PA fell in both absolute terms and as a percentage of the aid budget: in 1990 it consumed 20 per cent of Swedish aid, whereas by 1997 the figure was just 5 per cent (falling to zero the following year). See diagram 1.
- A shift took place away from import support, toward both debt relief and budget support.
- The share of PA disbursed through the Sida administered country frame has declined in favour of the account “Support of Economic Reform and Debt Relief”, over which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has more direct control.

In common with other bilateral donors, Sweden conditions PA to reform, by which we traditionally mean

Diagram 1: Programme Aid as percentage of total Swedish aid



economic reform as defined and promoted by the World Bank and the IMF, i.e. micro- and macroeconomic reforms such as trade liberalization and privatization. During the 1990s, PA has also (and increasingly) been used to bring about political change, i.e. governance issues and political requirements, such as democratization. The link with economic reform means that, of Sida's six development objectives, PA is most strongly associated with the growth objective. Indeed, agreements and other documentation relating to PA, mention either growth as the objective or that the aid is intended to support reform. The evaluators have found no explicit mention of poverty reduction, not before the 1998 Budget Bill, which stated that “economic reform is a precondition for long term economic and social development and efficient poverty reduction”.

### The Evaluation

Over the past ten years, evaluations have been carried out of Swedish PA to a number of countries. These have, however, been country specific and have typically not addressed the question of how PA supports reforms

<sup>1</sup> *Import support* – the government receives forex, with some limitations on the use of that forex, i.e. it should be used to finance specific imports.

*Debt relief* – support given to pay the partner country's debt burden.

*Budget support* – the government receives forex which it sells to get the local currency, which is designated as the budget support.

Few evaluations have assessed how the different modalities of programme aid further economic growth and sustainable development. This report, a synthesis of thirteen working papers, attempts to answer related questions. The papers comprise field research in three countries: Nicaragua, Uganda and Vietnam, and desk studies of five countries: Bangladesh, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. The study also includes three thematic studies on conditionality, impact of adjustment policies and modalities of programme aid; and, finally, a study of the management of Swedish programme aid.

(referring to both political and economic reforms). In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of how PA works, the Government charged Sida with the task of evaluating Swedish balance of payments support, which has been more broadly construed by the evaluation department at Sida to mean programme aid.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the evaluation was to evaluate the impact of PA on economic growth. Analysis of impact must recognize that PA is a form of aid with two inputs: dollars (the foreign currency flow) and dialogue (the policy conditions and associated activities). To fulfill the purpose of the evaluation, analyses were carried out of the following key questions: (1) what is the rationale for Swedish PA and how has the rationale changed over time? (2) how has PA, in terms of volumes and modalities, evolved over time? and (3) three questions on PA impact: (i) how aid affects reform; (ii) how reform affects economic performance<sup>3</sup>; and (iii) the impact of the funds on growth and poverty. The evaluation thus covers both the management of PA and its impact.

The evaluation has been carried out by a team from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands. The evaluation team was headed by Dr. Howard White and comprised expertise in economics and political science. The evaluation has produced thirteen Working Papers and a synthesis report entitled *Dollars, Dialogue and Development. An evaluation of Swedish programme aid* (Sida Evaluation 99/17). Eight of the Working Papers are country studies: three field studies (Nicaragua, Uganda and Vietnam) and five desk studies (Bangladesh, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia). In addition, there is a study of the management of Swedish PA ("the Swedish report"), and thematic reports on conditionality, impact of reforms and modalities of PA.

All the reports have relied on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques, combining interviews, analysis of statistical sources and file research. Stakeholders both on the recipient and the Swedish side have been interviewed. Analyzing the impact of the funds on economic growth and poverty country-level studies are used, which trace how PA has affected certain macroeconomic aggregates, such as imports and government spending. The results of the impact analysis refer to total PA since that of a single donor cannot be isolated.

## Findings

With regard to impact, the first question is how donors have affected reforms. According to the evaluation, domestic political considerations, not donor pressure, are

the prime factor in determining economic and political reform. However, the evaluators emphasize that donors' contribution may be understated if the analysis is excessively focused on the formal trappings of conditionality and the associated negotiations. The evaluators have found that semiformal and informal channels of influence, besides formal conditionality, are very important in affecting policies. The evaluation concludes that the policy dialogue should be seen as a set of processes comprising formal conditionality and semiformal and informal channels. Table 1 presents the different channels that donors may use to influence policies.

Sweden is broadly supportive of the programmes of the International Financial Institutions (IFI).<sup>4</sup> According to the evaluation, there is no evidence of Sweden trying to put poverty more strongly on to the conditionality agenda, as may be expected given Sida's historical focus on poverty and income distribution. In general, Sweden does not appear to "stand out from the crowd" of bilaterals – but there are important exceptions of a clear Swedish influence, most notably in those countries in which Sweden has a "presence" established through years of good relations. This is most obvious in the case of Vietnam, but also applies to Nicaragua (see table 1).

There are good reasons to oppose the current hegemony of the IFIs in setting the policy agenda, and the most useful way that this can be done in, the report says, is through facilitating policy debate at the national level. Sweden's reputation for independence means that it is well placed to play this role. However, it is not clear whether Sida has the capacity (whether in terms of staff time or training) to carry such a role forward.

### Dollars, Dialogue and Development.

#### An evaluation of Swedish programme aid

Howard White, Anders Danielsson, Geske Dijkstra,  
Jan Kees van Donge, Naomi Leefmans, Maria Nilsson.  
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit  
Sida Evaluation 99/17

Next, what has been the impact of the supported reforms? The evaluation reports three main findings. First, unreformed economies perform worse than those that have initiated reform (with the exception of agricultural growth). Second, there are decreasing rates of returns to reforms. Third, reform has restored growth in some countries (e.g. Uganda and Vietnam) but not in others (e.g. Zambia, but also Bangladesh, Cape Verde and India); that is, reform appears to be necessary but not sufficient for restoring growth.

The impact of the funds (dollars) is found to be largely positive. The evaluators have found that whilst PA has supported higher imports (which would have been some 20-50 per cent lower in the absence of aid), debt payments (countries being unable to fulfil their obligations in the absence of aid) and government expenditure, this is not a one-for-one relationship. The fact that the countervalue (local currency raised by the

<sup>2</sup> Government decision dated 18 November, 1996

<sup>3</sup> Economic performance is measured through: growth, inflation, investment rate, export growth, agricultural growth, manufacturing growth.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank and the IMF

Table 1 Channels for Swedish influence

	Formal channels	Semi-formal channels	Informal channels
Direct influence on government	<p>Formal channels, such as annual aid negotiations and CG meetings, seem to have a relatively limited role insofar as direct influence on government is concerned for individual bilaterals. CGs are, however, important as a focal point for policy dialogue, providing an opportunity for co-ordinated bilateral action (e.g. in 1998).</p> <p>Sometimes disagreements may become formalised, the constitutional crisis in Nicaragua being the most prominent example in which Sweden has played the lead role. In other cases, such as Zambia, Sweden has acted as a part of the donor community. An exception to this general statement is where PA modalities have been a subject of these discussions and are playing a leading role in market development: Vietnam is perhaps the only case.</p> <p>Sweden has not in general adopted own conditionality independent from the IFIs; the exception being the experiment with Matching Funds in Tanzania.</p>	<p>“Presence” determines effectiveness of direct semi-formal links: very evident in Vietnam, and has been an important factor in other countries studied except Bangladesh and, possibly, Cape Verde.</p> <p>Studies and seminars have been used to good effect in several countries (notably Vietnam and also, though not part of this evaluation, Guinea-Bissau), and impact is assisted by presence – though this is not sufficient condition in cases where there is much competing material (as seems to be so for Tanzania). Policy seminars for civil society, as regularly held in Zambia, are a special case here.</p> <p>Semi-formal (and informal) links between ambassador/embassy officials and head of state/ministers are uneven. In cases where presence is high then ambassador has had strong and important links.</p>	<p>Swedish TA supports policy advice through the expertise it provides, but there was not evidence of using TA as an additional channel to exert pressure (indeed there was some opposition to the idea).</p> <p>The margins of CG meetings provide an important opportunity for intensified informal contacts with government officials.</p>
Indirect influence via IFIs	<p>The main formal channel, the Board, is commonly agreed to be ineffective.</p> <p>Opinions vary on impact <i>via</i> SPA, though difficult to find evidence at country level. The content of policy-conditionality has not strongly reflected SPA concerns on poverty or gender. JEMs were important for the management of programme aid, but cannot be held up as an instance of bilateral influence.</p> <p>No evidence was found of influence at the country-level <i>via</i> Trust Funds.</p>	<p>Less formal channels, as enquiries by Delegation staff and direct high-level communications do not appear to be much utilised.</p> <p>Contacts with in-country and visiting IFI missions, though often good (e.g. Tanzania and Vietnam – though in other places the IFI Resident Mission is seen as weak) is not seen as a channel for influence.</p>	<p>There are informal contacts from agency to IFI staff, but no instances were found in which these contacts can be said to have had influence. This is a general finding (i.e. applies to other bilaterals) and reflects the culture of the IFIs.</p>
Indirect influence via donor agencies	<p>There are few formal channels through which one bilateral can influence others; aid co-ordination bodies (DAC, SPA, CGs) present some opportunity, but it is not marked.</p> <p>The activities of like-minded groups may sometimes become more formalised</p>	<p>Sweden is often active in like-minded groups, e.g. in Mozambique and the non-group of donors in Zambia.</p> <p>Studies can help inform other donors in cases where there is a dearth of material; Guinea-Bissau is such a case, as was Vietnam in the late 1980s.</p>	<p>Informal links between bilateral agencies are clearly of great importance. In cases where the donor community is close-knit – which is most countries but in some, e.g. Zambia, more than others – then there is a common position which emerges rather than being set by a specific donor. Hence there are few instances of “leadership by example” (but the Nicaragua constitutional crisis is one), but to emphasise this lack would be to understate influence through these channels. Similar comments may be made concerning influence through informal channels associated with formal aid co-ordination, such as the margin of CG and SPA meetings.</p>

sale of the dollars), has not resulted in equivalent increases in expenditure, implies that there has been an anti-inflationary effect by offsetting deficit financing. In other words, the Government has not spent all PA, but has used the funds to decrease the budget deficit. Further, this has an anti-inflationary impact since the deficit most likely would have been financed with printing money if the PA would not have been used to offset the deficit.

Turning to the management of Swedish PA the evaluation emphasizes two findings. Firstly, PA is widely regarded as “political”, e.g. PA may act as a “political signal”, meaning that Sweden may freeze PA to signal discontent with the recipient’s policies. Secondly, the usual rationale for PA in Sida’s documentation, which is import support to fill the external gap<sup>5</sup> and budget support to fill the internal gap<sup>6</sup>, does not make economic sense since all modalities of PA provide both foreign exchange and local currency at the same time and thus fill both the gaps. This reflects a wider failing: many Sida officials appear to have a poor understanding of how PA results in either growth or poverty reduction. According to the evaluation, the only rationale for providing different modalities are the different systemic effects; e.g. import support has contributed to more liberalized exchange markets, and budget support has contributed to increased openness and efficiency of budget processes.

The evaluation concludes that PA has contributed to increased welfare through supporting expenditure and imports. However, its impact is not particularly strong, according to the report.

## Recommendations

The evaluation concludes that Sweden should continue to give PA, since it has demonstrated that PA has beneficial macroeconomic effects, both through the contribution of funds and through policy dialogue. Further, PA should be a mixture of debt relief and budget support. The report also holds that a better understanding, within Sida, of how PA inputs are meant to achieve their intended outcomes of growth and poverty reduction is required.

According to the evaluation, PA should be put back into the country frame, since PA should be an integral part of the assistance provided to partner countries and not, as currently, be seen as a residual.

Swedish PA should continue to be conditional on IFI reform programmes. However, the evaluators emphasize that Sweden should actively develop its image as an independent agency and try to influence the current nature of the reform programmes. There is need for complementary policies which Sweden should put forward.

Finally, the evaluation emphasizes that there should be a more active awareness on the part of Swedish officials that influence operates through a large number of channels (technical assistance, projects and studies) and make use of these channels.

The evaluation concludes that there is a future for PA. Indeed, there are good grounds for reversing the declining trend in PA. But expanding the PA budget should be made in the context of a new strategy for enhancing PA effectiveness.

There can be no doubt, the report concludes, that programme aid has improved welfare through supporting debt payment and imports. The evidence adds up to suggest that such aid will also have had some extra impact on growth, though the impact is not particularly strong.

## Lessons Learned

The evaluation may be summarized in the following lessons learned.

### *PA affects growth through higher imports and stabilization*

The evaluation emphasizes PA’s role in contributing to economic stabilization, i.e. PA has not resulted in equivalent increase in expenditure and so has an anti-inflationary effect by offsetting deficit financing. The causal relationship between higher imports and growth is, according to the evaluators, clear.

### *Extensive liberalization is not necessarily better than selective liberalization*

The evaluation has shown that full market liberalization not necessarily implies better economic performance, which is the common view within the donor community. Rather, the evaluation suggests that some measures of complementary policies are required to correct for market failures, e.g. government support for credit and extension services, labour-intensive public works, and investment in infrastructure and basic services.

### *Policy dialogue is a set of processes*

Donors’ influence through formal conditionality has proved to be limited. Instead, domestic politics are the prime factors in shaping the reforms according to the evaluation. However, donors may influence policies through using a mixture of formal, semiformal and informal channels, that is, policy dialogue should be seen as a set of processes taking place through both formal and informal channels.

### *The danger of micro-management and the importance of donor harmonization*

According to the evaluation, different PA modalities have had different systemic effects. These effects may, however, be hampered by the fact that restrictions and reporting requirements sometimes are excessive and lag behind changes in the recipient country. Consequently, the evaluators emphasize the dangers of attempting to micro-manage domestic processes as well as the importance of donor harmonization. ■

<sup>5</sup> A shortage of foreign exchange = external gap

<sup>6</sup> Government budget deficit = internal gap



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