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Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Sida's support for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries.

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Sida Evaluation 02/01.

Promoting gender equality in partner countries – an evaluation of Sida's mainstreaming strategy

Background

Equality between women and men has been on the agenda for development co-operation since the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, where a majority of the world's states recognized that gender equality is not only a central human rights issue, but also an essential precondition for sustainable poverty reduction.

In 1996, gender equality was established by the Swedish parliament as one of six goals for Swedish development co-operation. The following year, Sida presented its action programme for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries. The programme defines gender equality as equal rights of women and men to influence, participate in, and benefit from development co-operation.

Sida's action programme incorporates a mainstreaming strategy, whereby gender equality concerns should pervade all development policies, strategies and interventions. Mainstreaming aims to ensure that women as well as men are involved in all stages of co-operation planning, implementation and follow-up, so that development processes meet the needs and interests of both women and men.

The evaluation

Sida's action programme is scheduled for revision. The revision will take stock of mainstreaming experiences in Sida-financed co-operation, and analyse how the action programme may be developed. This was the background to an evaluation initiated in 2000 by Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV). The purpose of the eval-

uation was to draw lessons from gender equality mainstreaming, and to support the planned revision of the action programme.

The main questions addressed by the evaluation concerned how Sida's mainstreaming strategy has been reflected in country strategies, and translated into action in projects and in the dialogue between Sida and its partners. Specific attention was paid to potential gender equality results of individual projects.

The evaluation focused on twelve Sida-financed projects in Bangladesh, South Africa and Nicaragua, in the areas of urban development, democratic governance, health and education. The projects were chosen because they were assumed to have mainstreamed gender equality concerns, or because they were presumed to have resulted in identifiable gender equality developments.

The evaluation is published under the title *Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Sida's support for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries* (Sida Evaluation 02/01, Stockholm, January 2002). It was carried out by COWI, a Danish consultancy, in co-operation with Canadian Goss Gilroy and local consultants in Bangladesh, South Africa and Nicaragua. The core team consisted of Britha Mikkelsen (team leader), Ted Freeman and Bonnie Keller.

Findings

Mainstreaming in country strategies

The 1997 country strategies for the co-operation with Bangladesh and Nicaragua represent a high water mark in their attention to gender equality. They reflect much of the momentum created by the Beijing conference and the subsequent preparation of Sida's ac-

Police officers in Ocotol, Nicaragua. Photo: Magnus Rosshagen.

The national police academy project in Nicaragua illustrates the importance of institutional capacity and of ensuring links between institutions, in support of gender mainstreaming.



Reinforcing links between gender equality and poverty reduction is essential and must be made explicit, the report argues.

tion programme for gender equality. At that time, there was much enthusiasm for the gender equality objective, both at Sida headquarters and the embassies, and this spirit influenced the country strategy processes and contents in a number of ways.

The 1997 Nicaragua strategy included explicit statements that gender equality was a priority for Sida's policy dialogue and a key objective for co-operation in the legal area and for the reduction of violence to women. Overall, the Nicaragua strategy represented a breakthrough in its direct treatment of gender equality as a goal for co-operation. This is also the case with the 1997 Bangladesh strategy, which reflects the most complete application of Sida's mainstreaming strategy across all country strategies evaluated.

More recent country strategies, including that for the 1999–2003 co-operation with South Africa, appear to have lost some of the steam built up in the mid-1990s. In particular, the gender equality goal is less pronounced in these strategies, and the relationship between gender equality and poverty reduction not fully explored. In the case of Nicaragua, this trend coincided with Sida's decision to manage the co-operation for 2001–2005 through a regional strategy for Central America and the Caribbean. Regional strategies, the evaluators note, do not

provide the same strategic detail and specificity as individual country strategies.

Mainstreaming in Sida-financed projects

Gender mainstreaming in Sida-financed projects differs from mainstreaming in country strategies in several respects, the most important being that while Sida is responsible for mainstreaming in its country strategies, it is Sida's partners that have the main responsibility for mainstreaming in the projects supported by Sida. In many cases, however, Sida has reason and opportunity to take a proactive role also in project mainstreaming, for example through dialogue with partners on practices that bridge partners' gender equality policies and Sida's action programme.

Mainstreaming in individual projects involves a number of important but distinct elements. Most fundamental is the *gender analysis* that should be performed by project owners early on in the planning and design of the project. Gender analysis may reveal various kinds of inequalities that are relevant to the project and its objectives. The findings from the analysis will help project owners fine-tune the project to make positive contributions towards more equal gender relations, even if the project as such does not have gender equality as its main theme.

The evaluated projects fell short of the action programme's requirements regarding

Only projects with explicit gender equality objectives tend to exhibit evidence of both mainstreaming and positive gender equality impacts.

gender analyses. For several projects, analyses were carried out, but they were, according to the evaluators, often general and not directly relevant to the specific context of the projects. In some cases, this was due to a lack of gender-disaggregated data, a necessary prerequisite for any gender analysis. In other cases, where such data indeed were available and collected, they were not systematically analysed, reported and used. Hence, opportunities for making adequate alterations to programme planning and implementation were lost, and the potential for gender equality achievements not fully exploited.

Another crucial mainstreaming element is the formulation of project *objectives* with gender equality contents. The evaluation concludes that it makes an important difference whether objectives with a gender equality dimension are formulated clearly and unambiguously. Projects with such objectives are more likely to have positive impacts in terms of equal access to public services and women's ability to exercise their human rights.

Eight of the twelve projects, the evaluators find, fell short of the action programme's requirements regarding gender equality objectives. For example, several projects had women's participation in project activities, rather than gender equality developments, as their stated objectives. The evaluators found that projects focusing their gender attention on a specific level or rate of women's participation in project activities tended to disregard potential ways of addressing inequalities and achieving positive gender equality results.

The two projects with the most explicit gender equality objectives were also those within the sample that exhibited most evidence of both mainstreaming elements and positive gender equality impacts. One of these, a project in support of the national police academy in Nicaragua, illustrates the fact that objectives with a gender equality content do not necessarily have to be fully articulated from day one of the intervention. In this case, issues of gender equality and women's empowerment were increasingly perceived as urgent and accepted among various stakeholders during implementation, rather than part and parcel of early project design.

In order to further unpack the broad process of mainstreaming, the evaluation looked at some inter-related elements that influence the degree to which mainstreaming indeed takes place, for example the extent to which the project provides an *institutional structure* capable of supporting wider gender mainstreaming processes.

The national police academy project in Nicaragua is an example of the importance of institutional capacity and the links between institutions in support of gender mainstreaming. The academy is supported by the national police institution, which increasingly has appreciated the benefits of gender equality, and which greatly has helped improve the chances of success of the Sida supported project.

To conclude, the mainstreaming of gender equality concerns in individual projects did not meet the high level of ambition reflected in Sida's action programme. Most projects exhibited only embryonic evidence of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming processes are often complex and multi-faceted, and it is hardly surprising that the projects did not meet the high ambition of the action programme.

Mainstreaming in the dialogue between Sida and its partners

Dialogue between Sida and its partners on strategic priorities is a key factor in the process of gender mainstreaming. Dialogue is necessary for reaching a joint understanding of gender equality with reference to specific projects, as well as to general policies related to the Swedish country programmes.

What is striking about the *project specific dialogue* is the variation in intensity of the dialogue from one intervention to another. Interested embassy staff were able to advance a fairly detailed dialogue in relation to specific interventions, for example in the areas of local government in South Africa. In other projects, the dialogue often seemed to be pursued with limited capacity and effort.

In general, the *policy dialogue* on gender equality, which typically has a government-to-government character, is most successful when it has a specific purpose in terms of expected responses from partner governments, and where like-minded donors act in concert. This was the case in Nicaragua, where key donors,

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Dialogue is key for reaching a joint understanding of gender equality and the process of mainstreaming.

Sida included, were instrumental in bringing about the government's decision to restore the independence of the National Women's Institute, previously under the authority of the more conservative Ministry of the Family.

In South Africa, the annual consultations with the government are used as a forum for policy dialogue on gender equality issues. According to the evaluators however, there has been a lack of specificity in that dialogue. Apparently, there was no documented discussion of how to operationalize the theme of equality within specific areas and sectors. Staff shortages have impeded the embassy from pursuing an active bilateral dialogue; this has also been a problem in Nicaragua and Bangladesh.

Gender equality results of Sida funded projects

The evaluation was aimed at identifying different kinds of project results relevant to the promotion of gender equality. Three broad types of results were considered: changes that correspond to women's practical needs and strategic interests, women's empowerment, and changed male roles and ideas about masculinity.

For all projects in Nicaragua, Bangladesh and South Africa, results corresponding to *women's practical needs* were identified. Examples include better reproductive health services in Nicaragua, and increased gender awareness in literacy courses for adults, youth and working children. Female employment benefits and reduced vulnerability to sexual violence were some of the results in South Africa.

Changes corresponding to *strategic interests*, i.e. structural changes that even out imbalances in the power relations between women and men, present a less uniform picture. In Bangladesh, where women's isolation is a major barrier to gender equality, the Sida-supported mass literacy programmes seem to have helped reduce the exclusion and marginalization of large groups of women.

Women's empowerment was an explicit objective in only a third of the projects evaluated, but women's empowerment was often a side-effect of the other two-thirds. Many female participants in project activities reported that they had gained self-esteem and confidence, acquired new skills and grown into new con-

structive roles. Even so, the evaluation showed that the projects with explicit empowerment objectives also produced stronger results in terms of more power and status for women in relation to men.

Only two projects, both of them in Nicaragua, provided evidence of a direct intent to deal with issues of *male roles and ideas about masculinity*. Public concern with the role of machismo and violence in Nicaraguan society has spurred a national debate on masculinity in Nicaraguan culture and its association with domestic and other types of violence. In this context, the integrated local health project challenged accepted male roles, provoked reaction and triggered a questioning of current ideas about masculinity.

There is a range of factors promoting or inhibiting gender equality results of individual projects. Only some of these factors, such as inadequate gender analysis, are internal to the projects themselves. Local factors such as political commitment and a generally supportive culture, are always crucial for the realisation of gender equality developments.

Conclusions and lessons

Experience of gender equality mainstreaming is still in its infancy. Five years is a short time for a strategy to take root and produce effects, and mainstreaming is not always well understood by Sida staff and the partners. The evaluators conclude that mainstreaming remains a worthwhile and workable strategy in the action programme for promoting gender equality. However, considerable work remains to be done in order to build capacity for such promotion.

Sida's present strategy for gender equality mainstreaming faces a number of constraints. These include weaknesses in partner organizations, inadequate capacity and interest among Sida staff and consultants, limited use of gender analysis, and weak systems and procedures for monitoring gender equality processes and results.

There is an obvious need for a set of core requirements that represent a reasonable minimum level for gender mainstreaming. This should be in place, not to encourage Sida staff and partners to achieve only the minimum, but to avoid what appears to be an existing all-

Most factors promoting or inhibiting gender equality results are external to the projects. Political commitment and a supportive culture are crucial for the realization of gender equality developments.

The evaluated projects failed to meet the high ambitions of Sida's action programme for gender equality – most of them exhibit only embryonic evidence of mainstreaming.

Minimum core requirements for successful gender mainstreaming include project specific gender analysis, clear objectives for expected gender equality results, and systematic monitoring and reporting of gender related results.

or-nothing approach that often results in pro-forma or simplistic mainstreaming efforts. The minimum requirements recommended by the evaluation include a reasonable level of project specific gender analysis, clear objectives for expected gender equality changes, and systematic monitoring and reporting on gender related results.

According to the evaluators, the revision of Sida's action programme should also re-examine the opportunities and constraints of Sida's use of dialogue for the promotion of gender equality. Project specific dialogue should be recognised as a key staff function for all programme officers at the embassies, and be reinforced by management.

Swedish and Dutch support for gender equality in Bolivia – a joint evaluation

Sweden and Holland collaborate closely to promote gender equality in Bolivia, the poorest country in South America. Gender equality is a declared policy objective of the Bolivian government, both as an objective in its own right and as a condition for poverty reduction.

In order to provide inputs to the current reassessments of Swedish and Dutch support for gender equality in Bolivia, a joint evaluation was undertaken in early 2002. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess to what extent the Swedish and Dutch contributions since 1998 have been effective and relevant to international and Bolivian gender policies, as well as to the gender strategies governing Swedish and Dutch co-operation with Bolivia. A total of seven projects in support of gender equality in the areas of governance and education were examined.

The evaluation indicates that Swedish and Dutch gender approaches have been in line with the international gender policy framework, for example through the strategic choices of programme support to gender-disaggregated statistics, to education and to sexual and reproductive health services.

While Sweden, through Sida, has developed a number of relevant policies and strategies for the promotion of gender equality, implementation has not always been effective, due mainly to staffing constraints. The Dutch, on the other hand, have devoted less time and effort to policies and strategies, but instead focused on effective project implementation through allocations of adequate human and

financial resources combined with appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

Sweden and Holland emphasizes Bolivian ownership of gender equality mainstreaming. The support is mainly geared to the Vice-Ministry for Gender, Generations and Family Issues which promotes mainstreaming in Bolivian public services. Sweden has limited its support to a few strategic areas, whereas Holland has stressed the participation of their special gender experts in the programming of the Dutch support. The evaluators find that the Swedish approach has been appropriate, given the limited size of the Swedish administration. The more proactive Dutch approach has also been successful, mainly through the central role given to its gender experts.

With respect to the future country strategy for Swedish co-operation with Bolivia, the evaluators recommend that the strategic support for gender mainstreaming at the central level of the Bolivian government be maintained, but on the basis of strong links with the goal of poverty reduction.

The Swedish embassy should further strengthen its capacity for gender analysis and mainstreaming, especially with respect to sector-wide approaches, and in order to improve the implementation of Sida's gender policies. Given the anticipated expansion of the Swedish budget for the co-operation with Bolivia, the evaluation recommends that a gender specialist should be posted at the embassy. Policy provisions for gender equality must always be matched with adequate staff resources.

Evaluation of Sweden's and Holland's Strategies for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Bolivia.

Tom Dahl-Östergaard,
Sarah Forti, Mónica Crespo.
Sida Evaluation 02/09.

While **Sweden** has focused on the development of policies and strategies, the **Dutch** support has been more proactive and oriented towards project implementation. Both approaches were found relevant and successful.

To improve implementation of Sida's gender policies, the capacity of the Swedish embassy in La Paz for gender analysis and mainstreaming needs to be strengthened.

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