



Sida Evaluations Newsletter

No 1/05

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Sida's Work with Culture and Media

Does support to culture and media in developing countries contribute to poverty reduction? If so, how? Is Sida's policy for culture and media relevant as regards poverty reduction? Are projects in this sector relevant and effective? These questions are dealt with in a recently published evaluation commissioned by Sida's Department for evaluation and internal audit.

Background

That support to culture and the media can play a significant role in the effort to reduce poverty is often overlooked and misunderstood and thus given low priority in development co-operation. In fact, it is not uncommon among development practitioners to regard such support as unnecessary and a waste of resources. Furthermore, the discourse on the relationship between poverty reduction and culture and the media has been relatively meagre — probably because of the low status that these sectors command. Only a few development organi-

sations have formulated culture and media policies. Among them is Sida, who has been at the forefront of these endeavours.

In 2000 Sida prepared its *Policy for Sida's International Development Co-operation in the Field of Culture*, which is both progressive and cutting edge. Since then, an estimated MSEK 900 has been disbursed to culture and media efforts in 20 countries. Media projects account for around two-fifths of this support. The rest has been disbursed to projects in the areas of performing arts, cultural heritage, literature and visual arts. Africa has received the great- ▶

Key issues

- Sida's support to culture and media is relevant to poverty reduction efforts. Culture allows people to express themselves freely, boost creativity and can contribute to feelings of self-esteem and dignity. The media can provide important information and enhance political accountability.
- Evaluators recommend that the policy should be revised and divided into one policy for media and another one for culture. Considerable more effort needs to be devoted to the media policy.
- Culture and media projects are of solid quality and appear to be having the desired effects. Project design is, however, a problem.
- Culture and media projects are often small-scale. Larger funds to such projects may be harmful.
- The roles and responsibilities of Swedish organisations in projects are not always clear to partners in the South.

est amount of Sida support while the largest country-level disbursements have been to South Africa, Vietnam, West Bank/Gaza and Tanzania.

The Evaluation

The evaluation of *Sida's Work with Culture and the Media* was commissioned by Sida/UTV to feed into the revision of the *Policy* which is being undertaken to ensure its coherence with the current over-arching priorities in Swedish development co-operation. The aim of the evaluation was to establish the actual role support to *culture* and *media* play in the poverty reduction effort and the role it should play. Key aspects included providing an overview of the discourse regarding culture, the media and poverty reduction. Relevance and effectiveness were the only evaluation criteria to be applied.

COWI A/S conducted the evaluation which included an in-depth desk study to establish a conceptual framework concerning the role of culture and media in the poverty reduction effort; country case studies in South Africa, Tanzania and Vietnam; semi-structured interviews with over 100 key stakeholders; questionnaires; two SWOT workshops; an analysis of the PRSPs of 16 of Sida's partner countries; a study of the culture and media policies of other international donors; and a web-based effort to seek the perspectives, ideas and views of around 250 stakeholders across the globe.

Culture and media and poverty reduction

To assess the relevance of Sida's culture and media support, a conceptual framework was established by the evaluation team. The framework took into consideration that culture and the media cover a variety of functions in to-

day's society. Although they intersect with each other at several levels, they are distinct: culture has an intrinsic value while the media, constituting means of mass communication, does not. While freedom of expression is relevant to both culture and the media, it also encompasses more than these two fields. Likewise, not all culture and media activities can be considered to be free expression.

Poverty reduction is achieved by changes in society and its structures. In most cases, economic efforts alone are not enough to reduce poverty since its causes are not only economic—but also social, cultural, civic and political. A successful approach to the multidimensional nature of poverty therefore requires a broad range of efforts that target the social, cultural, economic, civic and political causes and manifestations of poverty.

Although culture and the media are only some of the many factors that can bring about change in society, overlooking their role in poverty reduction would, according to the evaluators, be an error. They argue that both culture and media have a strong potential to promote human resources. First, culture can further *skills* related to cultural production or the *knowledge* that can be gained from the messages conveyed in an art form. Second, it can promote creativity and the ability to solve problems. The evaluators note that creativity is an often undervalued human resource in development contexts, despite it being a driving force in development since pre-historic times. Third, culture can contribute to a *positive sense of being* which includes feelings such as self-esteem, dignity and self-confidence that can be experienced individually or collectively. While this may be difficult to measure, it is nevertheless an important factor.

Meanwhile, the media enhances human resources by providing *information* that citizens

FACTS Innovative Evaluation Techniques

How do you assess an area of support in relation to its relevance to poverty reduction if i) you do not have the resources to undertake in-depth research on the needs of the poor; ii) national policies and poverty reduction strategies at best barely address the issues at stake; iii) donor policies and seminal works such as Narayan's *Voices of the Poor – Can Anybody Hear Us?* do not provide sufficient clues? This evaluation tackled the problem using two techniques. First it undertook in-depth desk studies of the connection between culture/the media and poverty reduction to establish a conceptual framework to clarify the roles, relationships and proces-

ses involved, which furthermore could constitute a basis for examining the support's relevance in relation to poverty reduction. Next, it sought the views and ideas of stakeholders around the world. Using email and a website, the team reached 250 institutions and individuals involved in Sida's support. While the respondents were culture and media practitioners who generally cannot be classified as poor, most work directly with poor groups in society. The responses were often rich in ideas that the team could organise thematically and use as a complementary means of assessing the relevance of Sida's culture and media support to poverty reduction.



A woman dancing at the Sida-supported dance school in Managua, Nicaragua.

can convert into *knowledge*. This can range from information on issues relating to poverty reduction and socio-economic aspects, to information on citizen's rights, political issues and legal remedies. Another human resource that the media can contribute to is a *sense of citizenship*. It can do this by providing information on the various aspects of citizenship (such as rights and obligations and duties of the state) and imparting the means for engaging in social debate and dialogue.

Culture and the media can also enhance *socio-political resources* since they both enable people's *participation* in civil society, albeit in different ways. They also offer important forums for dialogue and debate and platforms for expression – be it artistic, economic, social, cultural, civil or political. Artists can give voice to the voiceless and provoke critical thinking by depicting societal injustice and inequality. The media can uncover and expose corruption, abuses of power and inept policies, which enhances *transparency*, *accountability* and *the rule of law*. The media can thus have a significant impact on governance at the local, regional and national levels.

People's *material resources* can also be enhanced through culture. The music industry, publishing industry and cultural industries (especially those connected with tourism) all have considerable potential for generating economic growth. In this context, intellectual property rights which safeguard fair remuneration to the original creators are important. A vibrant media sector can also

enhance material resources by offering employment ranging from news reporting to delivery of papers. By generating business through advertisements and providing market information, it can also boost the economic output of other sectors. The media's role in mitigating corruption can also increase (or decrease the diversion of) material resources destined to benefit the poor.

The evaluators conclude that the human, socio-political and material resources that culture and the media enhance can promote collective and individual empowerment. This in turn can lead to structural changes in society that advance the reduction of poverty. Thus, development agencies have the potential to improve poverty reduction efforts by providing support to culture and media which focuses on strengthening these resources. However, the principles of human rights need to underlie such support. Cultural liberty, freedom of expression and the right to information and participation are central in this context. In addition, concepts such as cultural diversity, media pluralism and media independence are important to the extent that they further human rights and freedoms.

Findings regarding relevance and effectiveness

All-in-all, the evaluation team considered that Sida's support to culture is relevant to poverty reduction efforts and coherent with the perspectives of those professionally engaged in cultural activities in the South. The majority of the interventions financed by

Sida have provided inputs that enhance human, social, political and material resources. The extent to which these efforts have actually led to empowerment was difficult to measure in concrete terms, although there was, nevertheless, some anecdotal evidence. A greater effort among the partners to monitor indicators of projects having had an impact on the empowerment of people and communities would be desirable and is likely to show some results.

Sida's support to the media was also considered to be relevant to poverty reduction. However, there are substantial opportunities to improve relevance in this area. Most importantly, more interventions need to be based on the recognition of the media's role in (i) contributing to accountability, the rule of law, justice and the exposure of corruption; and (ii) education and communicating various types of information that can assist poor communities to improve their situation (sanitation, agricultural techniques, local markets, basic education, health, voting, legal remedies, human rights, etc.).

Sida has shown competence and insight in the choice of efforts it supports and has been pro-active in exploring new forms of support. The effectiveness of the interventions supported varied, as can be expected with such a large portfolio. On the whole, the evaluators found that projects are of solid quality and appear to be having the desired effects. Project design is, however, a

serious problem that has been reiterated by several evaluations and reviews. The evaluators emphasise that unclear objectives and poorly designed implementation strategies reduce effectiveness, hamper evaluations from adequately fulfilling their function, and have a serious impact on accountability with regard to both beneficiaries and Swedish tax-payers.

The evaluation uncovered several management issues that impact on the relevance and effectiveness of the support. To begin with, there are no cross-divisional forums, processes or networks to discuss culture and media-related issues within Sida, despite that half a dozen divisions and a number of embassies are involved in this area. This undermines institutional learning and hinders the possibility of formulating a strategic direction. Next, Sida has not been able to establish a complete statistical overview of its culture and media support. This failure leads to a misrepresentation of the support and can hamper its overall coherence. Third, Sida is under pressure to rationalise the administration of its support by entering into fewer contracts and disbursing more funds to each intervention. However, effective culture and media projects are usually small-scale involving relatively few resources. Thus they are often not capable of absorbing larger amounts, and there is a risk that the prospects for long-term sustainability may actually worsen with large allocations of funds.

A mother and her daughter at the childrens section of the national library in Guatemala. Sida is financing the library sector in four countries in Latin America.

PHOTO: Lillemor Lindh



Fourth, based on the desire to delegate the administration of projects to culture professionals and to ensure a North-South exchange to promote inter-cultural dialogue, Sida's support involves a high number of Swedish organisations. These organisations are culture actors first and foremost and their knowledge of development issues, conditions in developing countries and established practices of project management are not their primary strengths. The roles that these institutions have played have ranged from being *administrators*, *technical consultants* and/or an *equal partner* with a southern organisation. When organisations have been expected to play more than one role within a programme, southern ownership and effectiveness have sometimes been negatively affected. While it must be regarded as a success that Swedish institutions draw benefit and build internal capacity as a result of mutually advantageous partnerships with southern organisations, the evaluation states that it is questionable to what extent Swedish development co-operation should finance this. The evaluators argue that there is reason to explore alternative funding mechanisms so that the Swedish government finances the Swedish part of these partnerships by other means than via Sida's budget.

Recommendations

The evaluation's key recommendations include the following:

1. Sida's culture policy should be revised to include the issues raised by the

evaluation. Because support to culture and the media contribute to poverty reduction in different ways, the policy should be separated into one policy for media, and another for culture. Considerably more effort needs to be devoted to the new media policy. Media can strengthen citizenship; is an instrument for accountability; can promote the rule of law and transparency; may expose power abuse and corruption and can inform poor communities about ways to improve their situation. The current policy does not, according to the evaluation, ensure a full appreciation of all of these roles. Thus it does not express the full potential of media in the poverty reduction effort.

2. To ensure a relevant and effective implementation of the updated policies, Sida should develop a Sida-wide strategy for culture and media respectively. This requires comprehensive consultation involving all relevant divisions and embassies and regular follow-up processes.

3. When engaging Swedish organisations in projects, the role and responsibilities of the Swedish partner should be clear to all parties, including those in the South. The Swedish partner's capacity should be ascertained by ensuring that the organisation has experience of and networks in developing countries, adequate project management capacities, an understanding of the goals of development co-operation and that it is capable of adding value. Organisations that are unable to live up to these demands should not be engaged.

FACTS Support to Culture and Media from a Rights Perspective

In the Swedish Government bill 2002/03:122 *Shared Responsibility. Sweden's policy for global development* it is stated that Swedish development co-operation shall take its departure from a rights perspective, and a perspective of the poor. According to a rights perspective poor people are not to be regarded as an object in need of support, but as subjects with human rights and a willingness and power to accomplish development on their own. However, in many countries poor people need assistance in order to exercise their rights and thus accomplish development. From this perspective support to both culture and media are important components of development co-operation. Culture allows people to express themselves freely, boost

creativity and can contribute to feelings such as self-esteem, dignity and self-confidence. The media enhances human resources by providing information on for example citizen's rights, political issues and legal remedies. It can also uncover and expose abuses of power which enhances transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Culture and the media can furthermore enhance socio-political resources since they both enable people's participation in civil society. They offer important forums for dialogue and debate and platforms for expression – be it artistic, economic, social, cultural, civil or political. All-in-all both culture and media thus informs people about their human rights, and allows them to exercise cultural, political and civil rights.

Sounds of Change

Sida's Division for Culture and Media has recently published a study on the role of music in development, *Sounds of Change - Social and Political Features of Music in Africa* (edited by Stig-Magnus Thorsén). The report is published in the *Sida Studies*-series, where a selection of the reports and studies commissioned by different departments at Sida are published. The series sheds light on issues of importance in current development policies and has been produced particularly for those who wish to go into greater depth in these issues. Sida has commissioned the reports, but it is the opinions of the authors alone that are presented. The series includes the following titles:

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