



**This issue of Sida Evaluations Newsletter (SEN)** is the first using a new layout and design. The ambition has been to improve on reader friendliness, a request that first appeared in response to a readers' inquiry commissioned by the editorial group in 1998. We hope the result meets with the approval of most of our readers. The aim with SEN remains: to make the results of Sida evaluations, and methodological studies like the one presented here, accessible to readers interested in Swedish development cooperation. Throughout, the views and interpretations communicated are those of the report authors and should not be attributed to Sida. As a rule, the views or response of Sida and concerned actors are not accounted for.  
*The editor*

## The challenge of evaluating support for democracy and human rights

### Background

In 1997, Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV) initiated an assessment of the evaluability of the agency's support for democracy and human rights (D/HR). The initiative came as a response to the fact that D/HR evaluation, in particular of development impact, is widely considered difficult. Despite a large number of evaluations carried out over the last decade, Sida still has little reliable information on the impact of its D/HR support. Why is that? What makes D/HR support difficult to evaluate? What are the requirements of successful impact evaluation? How could the D/HR support be planned and implemented in order to better facilitate such evaluation?

Sida's D/HR support consists of a wide range of projects, for different purposes and with different prospects for impact evaluation. As a first step in preparing the assessment, UTV made an inventory of 584 projects, with a total cost in 1996 of SEK 474 million, representing around 90% of Sida's D/HR support, or nearly 18 per cent of total Sida ODA disbursements during that year. The inventory suggested that almost all projects could be classified under five broad but distinct categories:

- capacity building for public and civil organizations
- civic education for the general public
- external monitoring of elections and treaties
- human rights counselling
- scientific research.

The inventory led to the conclusion that around two thirds of the support were provided for capacity building of public and civil organizations, all targeting staff or structures of government and civil society.

Based on this inventory, UTV decided to focus the assessment on the impact of Sida's D/HR projects for capacity building of public and civil organizations. In other words, the study would assess to what extent and how such projects could be evaluated with respect to development impact. 28 projects in Southern Africa and Central America, the main regions targeted by Sida's 1996 D/HR support, were sampled by UTV.

It was also decided that the assessment would focus on the individual logframes of the sampled projects. The logframe summarizes the project logic in a phased sequence of causes and expected effects.<sup>1</sup> As such, the logframe can help guide and structure an evaluation of how projects actually help bring about the intended development changes. An assessment of evaluability from a logframe perspective, therefore, examines the extent to which the conventional goal-oriented approach to impact evaluation in fact is possible.

### The Assignment

Against this background, the terms of reference for the assessment required the contracted consultancy, British ITAD in cooperation with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to:

- identify, through reviews of documents and interviews with project stakeholders,

<sup>1</sup> For example: *activities* (police training) deliver *outputs* (skilled police), which achieve the *purpose* (effective crime investigation) and contribute to the *goal* (reduced crime) and thereby also to the *higher goal* (D/HR development).

**The Evaluability of  
Democracy and Human  
Rights Projects. A logframe-  
related assessment.**

Derek Poate, Roger Riddell  
Sida Studies in Evaluation 00/3

For orders of the report please  
see address details at the  
bottom of page 4. The report is  
also available online:  
[www.sida.se/DHRevalassess](http://www.sida.se/DHRevalassess)

Several stakeholders said  
their project was a “process-  
project”, unsuitable for logframe  
planning. But this is often a  
misunderstanding. When for  
various reasons a project needs  
to change direction during  
implementation, the logframe  
can be adjusted accordingly. The  
important point is to not let the  
“process-nature” claim result in  
confusion on what the project is  
trying to achieve and how.

the explicit or implicit logframes on which the projects were based;

- analyse the extent to which the identified logframes described specific, measurable, realistic and agreed-on (among stakeholders) chains of causes and expected effects;
- examine the availability of relevant data for an analysis (during impact evaluation) of how well the different steps in the logframes were actually borne out.

The overall purpose was to produce useful lessons for impact evaluation of Sida's D/HR support, and to suggest how project planning and implementation could be improved with respect to subsequent evaluation.

The sample included thirteen projects in South Africa, seven in El Salvador, and four in Guatemala and Nicaragua. The projects, with values ranging from SEK 1 million to 32 million, covered a variety of D/HR-related areas, mainly governance of local administration; promotion of a human rights culture in the police and judicial systems; independence of the media; indigenous representation in peace accord negotiations; and, modernization of election systems. For a third of the projects Sida was the only donor.

The team collected information in three stages. A preliminary assessment of documents from Sida Headquarters in Stockholm was followed by reconnaissance visits to the four countries in November 1998. The main fieldwork was carried out in January and February 1999, undertaken by four international consultants with experience of logframe planning and evaluation, assisted by local consultants providing special D/HR expertise. Supervision and quality assurance of the assignment was provided by Mr. Derek Poate (ITAD) and Mr. Roger Riddell (ODI). The report, entitled *The Evaluability of Democracy and Human Rights Projects. A logframe-related assessment*. (Sida Studies in Evaluation 00/3), is being published in September this year.

The early stages of the assessment revealed that only one project had a regular logframe documented, and that project stakeholders were often unfamiliar with logframe planning and terminology. For this reason, the team concluded that it would be counterproductive to try to elicit project logframes during

field interviews. The interviews were instead concentrated on identifying development pathways, that is, narrative and less rigid descriptions of what projects are expected to do and why. The main features of the pathways were then summarized and translated by the team into the standard logframe language of outputs, purposes, goals, etc.

The team adopted an assessment model of eleven evaluability criteria, mainly concerning the project plans as reflected by the elicited logframes. Four of these eleven criteria were considered particularly important to goal-oriented impact evaluation:

- the quality of stated outputs, i.e. that stated outputs indicate a qualitative or quantitative change emanating from the goods and services produced by the project;
- the quality of the project purpose, i.e. that the purpose is adequately specified to provide a concrete understanding of the medium-term development change that is expected from the project, and, secondly, that this expected change is realistic in relation to activities and outputs, as well as measurable;
- the quality of baseline data, i.e. that such data describe the pre-project situation in a way which enables evaluators to identify relevant development changes that have taken place in the project environment, and
- the possibility of attributing the identified development changes to the evaluated project and also specifically to Sida's project contribution, i.e. the extent to which development can be reasonably considered caused by the project and Sida's contribution.

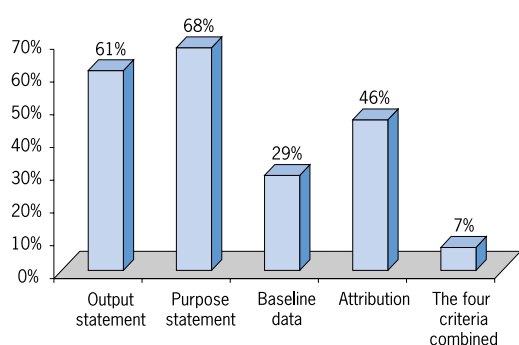
While quality of output and purpose statements are particularly required in carrying out goal-oriented evaluations, any type of successful impact evaluation depends on the quality of baseline data and the possibility of attribution.

The remaining seven evaluability criteria in the assessment model used concerned goal statements; agreement among different stakeholder groups on the project purpose; agreement on indicators, risks and assumptions taken into account in the project design; the quality of monitoring reports; accessibility to stakeholders; and, likely evaluation costs.

## Findings

The assessment showed that for an overwhelming majority of the 28 projects, it would be difficult to evaluate impact by means of goal-oriented approaches based on project logframes. Although most projects satisfied the criteria of quality of output and purpose statements, only two, both relatively large and long-term projects for institution building of provincial and local administration in South Africa, satisfied the four main criteria combined:

*Percentage projects satisfying crucial evaluability criteria*



The quality of goal statements, the first of the seven less crucial evaluability criteria, was found satisfactory for most of the assessed projects, in that the stated goals targeted a specific area of Sida's D/HR policy framework.

With respect to purpose statements, the team found that, even in cases of poor quality of such statements, there was often a reasonably wide agreement among stakeholders (mainly between Sida staff, implementing organizations and primary beneficiaries) on what kind of development changes the projects sought to achieve and contribute to. This in spite of the fact that for about a third of the projects, the purpose statements had changed with different funding phases.

While project documents seldom provided indicators, or criteria for project success, stakeholders were often able to suggest plausible and measurable indicators. The degree of agreement among stakeholders on indicators could however not be confidently confirmed during the assessment.

Project documents generally mention little in the way of risks to project success or the nature of the assumptions implied by the expected links between activities, outputs and

purposes. The team found that inadequate attention to risks and assumptions often involved over-optimistic expectations on the will and ability of recipient organizations to implement the projects successfully, and the preparedness of beneficiaries to respond to the goods and services produced by the projects in the anticipated way.

The most frequent of all evaluability problems concerned the quality of progress reporting. For almost all projects, reports were available, but the information provided was almost exclusively focused on project costs and activities. Output delivery, progress in terms of purpose achievement, and the risks to project success were generally not monitored and reported on.

For most of the assessed projects, access to different stakeholder groups does not constitute a major evaluability problem. With the exception of ultimate beneficiaries, for example township residents indirectly targeted by a capacity building initiative for health service delivery, most stakeholder groups can be contacted relatively easily.

The finding with respect to likely costs of impact evaluation is tentative only. The team's guess is that moderate to high evaluation costs can be anticipated.

## Conclusions

The assessment draws a number of conclusions, including the following:

- there are no special reasons why Sida's D/HR projects (compared to projects in other sectors) could not be planned in accordance with standard logframe practice, why relevant problem and base-line analyses could not be made, or why project progress could not be adequately monitored;
- the key problems of evaluability are rooted in the way projects are planned and implemented, in particular with respect to how outputs and purposes are defined and formulated, how problem and base-line analyses are made, and how project progress is monitored and reported on;
- if stated project purposes are not specific, measurable or realistic, the prospect for an evaluation of project effectiveness is limited;

**Changes of project purposes make the evaluator's task more complex.** Distinct phases of implementation that match different purposes may have to be treated separately, or even as separate projects. On the other hand, if a project purpose was appropriate at the outset of implementation, but has since become redundant and is now only of historical interest, what is the point of evaluation against such a purpose?

## Posttidning B

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- if relevant base-line data on the pre-project situation is not prepared in the early stages of the project cycle, it is difficult and often impossible to evaluate impact adequately;
- if monitoring reports do not provide information on output delivery and preliminary indications on purpose achievement, the evaluation of how projects unfold towards success becomes difficult and more costly at any stage, but particularly after the implementation period is over;
- if projects are planned and implemented in a way which enables impact evaluation, the conventional goal-oriented evaluation approach, based on project logframes, is both a feasible and efficient instrument for learning in the area of D/HR;
- the methodology used by the team for assessing evaluability, is likely to be useful in many cases where Sida and its counterparts prepare and undertake evaluation initiatives, in particular for eliciting logframes from narrative descriptions of what projects do and why, and for addressing the views of different stakeholder groups.

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