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Capacity Building and Networking

A meta-evaluation of African regional research networks

Jerker Carlsson
Lennart Wohlgemuth

Department for Evaluation
and Internal Audit

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This Report can be ordered from:

Biståndsforum, Sida
S-105 25 Stockholm Phone: (+46) 8 698 5722
Fax: (+46) 8 698 5638

Authors: Jerker Carlsson Lennart Wohlgemuth
Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

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SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY
Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Sveavägen 20, Stockholm
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
Telegram: sida stockholm. Telex: 11450 sida sthlm. Postgiro: 1 56 34-9
Homepage: http://www.sida.se

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Executive Summary

This report can best be described as a meta-evaluation. It takes a close look at nine evaluations of Sida's support to regional research collaboration in Africa. We summarize their experiences, discuss the format and structure of the evaluations, and propose a model for a more detailed evaluation design to investigate capacity building in the tertiary sector.

The following evaluations had been selected by Sida–UTV to be included in the sample study:

1. Thorbecke, E., *The AERC Research Programme: an evaluation*, 1996.
2. Christensen, J. and McCall, M. K., *AFREPREN: The African Energy Policy Research Network*, 1994.
3. Hassan, F. A., *Urban Origins in Eastern Africa (UOEA)*, 1993.
4. Lundgren, B., Brinck, P., Birgegård, L.-E., Ericsson, L. and Khalili, M., *Swedish Support to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)*, 1994.
5. de Vylder, S. and Hjort af Ornäs, A., *Social Science in Africa: The Role of CODESRIA in Pan-African Cooperation*, 1991.
6. Sawyerr, A. and Hydén, G., *SAPES Trust: The First 5 Years*, 1993.
7. Marope, M., Molokomme, A. and Talle, A., *Evaluation of SAREC's Women's Research Programme in Africa*, 1995.
8. Rudengren, J., Brinck, P., Davy, B. and Hedlund, C., *Sida/SAREC's Marine Science Programmes*, 1996.
9. Hydén, G., Meillassoux, C., Ndulu, B. and Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Strategies for the Future of Africa*, 1989

Swedish aid to research development is guided by two objectives:

1. To support research-capacity building in developing countries (the capacity objective);

2. To support research with the purpose of producing results relevant for developing countries (the result objective).

Regional research programmes are regarded as a complement to the bilateral programmes. They are to focus on research themes that are common to a smaller group of countries. Regional programmes are also justified in research areas that are not given adequate priority at the national level. Support through regional networks can be important when local conditions for national-based research are lacking. Thus, the value of regional programmes and research networks should primarily be assessed in a national context.

The report begins with a discussion of the rationale for Sida's support to regional research collaboration in Africa. The following section discusses how key concepts such as "capacity building", "institution" and "organization, are defined in the literature. This is followed by an international outlook, where we present the activities and experiences of

other international donors. The following section presents an analysis of the format of the evaluations. This formal exercise is followed by a summary of the achievements and experiences of the nine evaluations. This is done according to the criteria for aid evaluation established by Sida/UTV: relevance, goal fulfilment, cost-effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The final section of the paper outlines a possible model for a further evaluation.

Evaluations of capacity building require a concept that can be transformed into a concrete and useful tool for analysis and evaluation. A single focus on the individual is too narrow a perspective. The effectiveness by which individuals utilize their capacities does not take place in a vacuum. It is largely determined by the capacities of the institutions and organizations of a country. Institutional capacities focus on the ability to make optional use of existing individual capacities and resources in a sustainable manner. In other words, a full understanding of the problems surrounding the formation of human capital need to consider both the supply side of capacity building (the individuals) and the demand for those capacities (the institutions).

The evaluations assessed here have much in common—format, methodology, etc.—but what is noteworthy is that they all find that the research networks have, on par, been successful. Furthermore, they all recommend donors to continue their financial support.

What these nine evaluations have told us is that the projects are relevant and that they have achieved their immediate objectives. But they do not provide any substantial information on cost-effectiveness, impact or sustainability.

What is particularly striking is that none of the evaluations have addressed the important issue of long-term sustainability, especially at the national level. Our conclusion is therefore that Sida's objective to support regional networks, in order to improve on national research capacities, has not been dealt with and analysed sufficiently.

Three aspects of national research capacities receive little or no attention in the evaluations. These are: (*a*) the capacity to plan and conduct important research; (*b*) the capacity to apply research results to local conditions; and (*c*) the capacity to establish and maintain attractive research milieus. These aspects are also closely linked to two of Sida–UTV's evaluation criteria: impact and sustainability.

To answer these outstanding questions, we suggest an evaluation model based on a two-pronged approach, taking into account the supply of as well as the demand for capacities. The supply side is represented by the individual researcher who participates in the research network. This approach has its roots in the traditions of the tracer study. By tracing the researcher's work and activities before, during and, hopefully, after the time he is active in the network, it will shed some light on the impact of the network.

Institutional strength is the focus of the demand side of capacity building. If the individual researcher, representing the supply side, can be linked to impact, then the institutions, representing the demand side, can be linked to sustainability. The task here is to study the capacities of the organization that produces services related to higher education and research.

1. Introduction

This report can best be described as a meta-evaluation. Its purpose is to evaluate evaluations, that is, to evaluate how a group of projects with similar objectives have been evaluated.[1] In our study, we address nine evaluations of Sida-funded support to regional research collaboration programmes in Africa. Our main interest is to see whether the information provided by the evaluations enables us to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of this particular aid. Using the evaluation criteria identified by Sida—relevance, goals achievement, cost effectiveness, impact and sustainability—and defined in the support programmes' Terms of Reference (TOR), we summarize the experiences of the nine research networks, as described in the respective evaluations. On the basis of these findings, we discuss a possible methodological approach for evaluating the effectiveness of research networks.[2]

This study is structured in two parts. The first part addresses, in conceptual and general terms, policy issues, terminology and context for Sida's support to regional research collaboration in Africa. Section 2 introduces the study with a discussion of the rationale for supporting research networks. To provide a coherent conceptual framework for the comparative analysis that follows in the second part of the study, section 3 presents a review of how concepts such as "capacity building", "institution" and "organization" are defined in the literature. Section 4 places Sida's research support activities in an international context and presents the activities and experiences of other international donors.

The second part of the study consists of the actual meta-evaluation.The nine evaluations under scrutiny are presented in section 5. Section 6 provides an analysis of the format of the evaluations. In order to characterize the evaluations in a systematic way, we have used a framework once developed for Secretariat for Analysis of Swedish Development Assistance (SASDA). This more formal exercise is followed, in section 7, by a summary of the achievements and experiences of the nine evaluations, in accordance with the Sida evaluation criteria. Section 8 provides an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of structure and contents. Based on these experiences, section 9 concludes with a possible evaluation model.

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[1] The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Programme Evaluation Standards*, 2nd ed., London: Sage, 1994, p. 3.

[2] The Terms of Reference for this meta-evaluation are attached as Appendix 1. The TOR provide the background and define the purpose of this study.

2. The rationale of supporting research networks[3]

Swedish aid to research development is guided by two objectives:

1. To support research-capacity building in developing countries (the capacity objective);
2. To support research with the purpose of producing results relevant for developing countries (the result objective).

Sida uses several instruments for achieving these objectives:

- Bilateral research support, also called bilateral programmes;
- Regional programmes;
- International programmes;
- Special programmes;
- Support to conferences.

Research capacity is defined by Sida as a nation's capacity to:

- independently identify and define research projects on important development problems;
- plan and conduct important research or direct such research that cannot be conducted with available domestic technical, financial and human resources;
- assess, select and apply research results to local conditions;
- establish and maintain attractive and well-functioning research milieus, in order to counteract brain drain;
- participate in and make effective use of international research;
- distribute and disseminate research results;
- formulate a research policy which effectively utilizes available resources.

Aid for building research capacity must be highly relevant for the developing countries and, furthermore, characterized by high quality and long-term sustainability.

The purposes of regional programmes can emphasize both the building of research capacities, as well as more result-oriented research. In the poorest countries, for example in Africa, the emphasis is on capacity building, while support to production of research results of high quality becomes more important in middle-income countries. Regional networks of collaborating institutions can be one form for regional research collaboration. Thus, regional research networks derive part of their rationale from bilateral programmes and their orientation and objectives. It is therefore important that research networks are well linked with researchers and research institutions at the national level.

Regional research programmes are regarded as a complement to the bilateral programmes. They shall focus on research themes that are relevant for a smaller group of countries. Regional programmes are also justified in research areas,

[3] This section draws on a memo to the board of SAREC: Holmberg, J., Huvuddragen i SAREC's Policy, PM 1995-01-29.

which are not prioritized at the national level. Support through national networks can be quite important when local conditions for national-based research are lacking. Networks can under such circumstances also be important for research training purposes. A good example is Sida's support to the social sciences, which is largely channelled through regional programmes. An important consideration in this respect is the building of a "critical mass". Where there are too few local researchers to enable the formation of a mass of critical and independent thought, a regional programme may be a feasible way of organising an environment where an exchange of ideas and research results can take place.

To conclude, in the poorest countries the primary objective for Sida has always been capacity building at the national level. It is quite clear that this has also been the intention of SAREC in the research networks covered by the evaluations reviewed in this report. Research networks and regional programmes of the kind discussed here are instruments to achieve this general objective. Thus, the value of regional programmes and research networks should, in the first place, be assessed in a national context.

3. How can capacity building be defined?

The subject of this evaluation is capacity building—the building of capacities in individuals and/or institutions. This is an area which, seen over a longer historical period, has occupied a key position in strategies of development aid. It is also an area that is notoriously difficult to evaluate and where it is equally difficult to make assessments on the achievements of objectives. There are several reasons for this. One is associated with the lack of precise, and operationally useful definitions of key concepts. Before going into the actual evaluation, it is therefore necessary, at least briefly, to touch upon the problems surrounding definitions of key concepts such as "capacity building" and "institution".

Definitions are important and Cohen states the reason why:

> [L]ack of clarity over the definitions of concepts will inevitably lead to statements that seem to provide explanations, but which in fact do not.[4]

Capacity building is a particularly difficult area in terms of evaluation and analysis, because the concept is defined and used in many different ways. Its meaning also varies depending on how it is related to other concepts such as institution building, technical assistance and technical cooperation. As Conyers remarks:

[4] Cohen, J. M. *Capacity Building, Methodology, and the Language of Discourse in Development Studies*. Harvard Institute for International Development, Cambridge, 1994.

> A language which is plagued by ambiguities and inconsistencies, leads to confusion, misunderstanding and perhaps unnecessary conflict.[5]

For the evaluator, one of the more important tasks is to measure the level of capacity building, and to assess the long-term impact of the capacities being built. Classical methodology does this by specifying empirical indicators for measurement. But this cannot be done on the basis of vague, poorly defined concepts. Only carefully defined concepts can be operationalized by indicators that can be subjected to empirical verification.

In traditional usage, capacity relates to the ability, talent and competence of individuals. It is not commonly applied to organizations or institutions. A definition of human capacity building is provided by Shafritz:

> Capacity building . . . includes among its major objectives the strengthening of the capability of chief administrative officers, department or agency heads etc. to plan, implement, manage or evaluate policies, strategies or programmes designed to impact on social conditions in the community.[6]

Dia offers a definition where technical capacity building focus on increasing the supply of skills and transferring new technology, methods and systems. The means for doing this are education, training etc.[7]

Institutional capacity building, on the other hand, focus on the ability to make optional use of the existing individual capacities and other resources in a sustainable manner. This equals the demand for technical capacity. When applied to organizations and institution, capacity building consists of three main activities:[8]

- Skills upgrading (general education, on-the-job training and professional deepening in cross-cutting skills)
- Procedural improvement (functional changes and/or systems reform, such as budget arrangements and ownership structures)
- Organizational strengthening (reforming the capacity to use available money and staff more effectively)

Over time, capacity building has been used to describe a range of human, organizational and institutional strategies for addressing constraints to development. UNDP identifies six major types of capacity building:[9]

1. Macroeconomic policy management

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[5] Conyers, D. "Future Directions in Development Studies: a review of the literature", World Development, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1986:594.

[6] Shafritz, J.M. *Dictionary of Public Administration*. Oxford University Press:New York, 1986:79.

[7] Dia, M., *Africa's Management in the 1990's and Beyond. Reconciling Indigenous and Transplanted Institutions*, Washington: World Bank, 1996.

[8] Berg, E. J. *Rethinking Technical Cooperation. Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa*, New York: UNDP, 1993.

[9] Moore, M. *Promoting Good Government by Supporting Institutional Development*. IDS Bulletin 26, no.2, 1995:93.

2. Professional education
3. Public services reform
4. Private sector development
5. Popular participation in the choice of national goals
6. National development culture

Needless to say, a concept which can be defined in so many ways runs a grave risks of becoming analytically and methodologically impotent.

Sida's definition of the concept "research capacity" is another example of a definition that is difficult to use for an evaluator in an analytically stringent way. [10] Rather than taking its point of departure in the individual researcher's capacity, this definition starts off with a nation's capacity. It is hard to find a concept that is more difficult to handle analytically than "nation". Furthermore, the definition contains formulations which present valuation problems, such as "important development problems" or "important research".

To conclude, the concept of capacity building can be applied to individuals or institutions. In development aid, there has been a shift of emphasis from individual to institutional capacity building. Let us therefore turn to the concepts of "institution" and "organization", which are used in connection with capacity building. They are also two of the most misused concepts in the development debate today. Not only because actors are not always clear about the meaning they attach to a concept, but also because the concepts themselves can be defined in so many different ways.

The term "institution" may refer to a long-established law, a custom or practice or to an organization. Sometimes it refers to what may be called society's great institutions, i.e., markets, property rights, systems of education, etc.[11] Sometimes it connotes very specific formal arrangements. In this sense, "institution" can be a concept that focuses on actors, as well as a concept that focuses on instruments of reform.

In the social sciences, it is common to take a broad view on institutions. Gunnarsson points out that historians and sociologists tend to emphasize the durability of institutions.[12] It is this durability that creates the stability that makes repeated interaction between people possible. Institutions are complexes of normative rules and principles that serve to regulate social action and relationships.[13] This type of institutional analysis focuses on the fundamentals of human interaction in the tradition of Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Veblen.

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[10] See Section 2 of this report.

[11] von Pischke, J.D. *Finance at the Frontier: Debt Capacity and the Role of Credit in the Private Economy*. The World Bank:Washington D.C., 1991.

[12] Gunnarsson, C. *An Institutional Basis for Growth with Equity*. Working paper 7. Task Force on Poverty Reduction, Sida:Stockholm, 1996.

[13] Parsons, T., "Social Structure and the Symbolic Media of Interchange", in, Blau, P.M. (ed.) Approaches to the Study of Social Structure. Open Books:London, 1976:97

The other strand sees institutions as instruments of reform. Institutions are defined as the bureaucracy, a special government organization or agency, or an interest group. It is such institutions, together with the legal system, that are to be reformed in order to change the social system.[14]

Development agencies have shown a preference for defining institutions as formal institutions. In this way, institutions matter because they are a means towards changing the world. This type of institutionalism, focusing on institutional reform, has a long record in welfare economics.

Thus, on the one hand, there is an emphasis on the role of institutions that may imply an assumption that the prime obstacles to development are deeply rooted in the history of societies, and which therefore cannot easily be removed or overcome. On the other hand, there is the belief that development goals can be realised by means of institutional reform. The assumption is that it is possible to manipulate the social context in order to achieve development.

There are thus two forms of institutionalism. One which is concerned with studies of economic development in the broad context of social organization, and one which seeks to identify key institutions in development. The first approach is useful as a check against monocausal explanations and simplistic policy recommendations. It is not, however, very useful when it comes to targeting key institutions in development aid to setting practical agendas.

What are, then, the difference between an organization and an institution? As noted above, the definitions of "institution" span a continuum of possibilities. At one end, "institution" is more or less interchangeable with "organization". The university and the English pub are both institutions and organizations.

Berg defines an organization as the rational coordination of activities by a group of individuals with the aim of achieving some common goal.[15] A similar distinction between organization and institution is made by Moore.[16] An organization is a structure within which people cooperate according to accepted and recognized roles. Sometimes a qualification is added whereby an organization is defined as a recurrent pattern of human behaviour that is socially valued. Such a definition widens the concept of organization such that it actually borders on the concept of institution. At the same time it loses some of its operational significance, as it inevitably invites the question "valued by whom?".

Two points emerges from this. First, organizations are part of the fabric of institutions, but they are not institutions themselves. Second, institutional development means much more than just structural or functional changes of an organization. It also involves social change. Institutional development is therefore a much more profound process than organization development.

[14] Apter, D. Introduction to Political Analysis. Winthrop Publ.:Cambridge, Mass., 1977

[15] Berg (note 8).

[16] Moore, M., Stewart, S. & Huddock, A. Institution Building as a Development Assistance Method. Evaluation Report 1. Sida:Stockholm, 1995.

Moore offers a good explanation as to why institution building became institutionalized by development aid. Development was associated with a transformation of values. This perception was linked to Selznick's distinction between institution and organization. According to Selznick an institution was an organization possessing strong norms and values.[17] Selznick's definition was carried further and became more normative. Esman defined an institution as an organization which induces and protects innovation.[18] This provides a starting point for understanding what aid means by institution building:

> [I]t is largely the enterprise of trying to support improvements in the effectiveness of organizations, separately or in networks, by changing their structure, management procedures etc.[19]

Most aid programmes subsumed under the heading "institution building" has been of this nature, and has normally focused on a single organization. In a way one could say that the core of institution building, as practised in aid, has been organization building. It is important to point out, however, that in recent years there has been a shift in donor practices towards institution building in its broadest sense.[20]

"Institution" and "organization" clearly means different thing to different people. To conclude , we find in the literature four major definitions, or understandings, of what shall be meant by an institution or an organization:

1. "Institution" may denote a society's set of rules, such as property rights.
2. It may also denote a formal institution, such as the English pub.
3. An organization may also be referred to as an institution. This is the case when the organization is guided by a very strong "corporate culture" and not only a set of bureaucratic rules.
4. Finally, "organization" may denote a system by which individuals are organized together to accomplish a specific task.

Capacity building can be linked theoretically to all of these understandings, except the first where "institution" is defined in historical and sociological terms as a set of rules. Let us now summarize how we understand the concepts of capacity building and institution/organization, and how they are linked to each other, within the context of this study.

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[17] Selznick, P. *Leadership in Administration*, New York: Harper & Row, 1957. Basic to Selznick's view of organisations is the distinction between the rational, means-oriented, efficiency-guided process of administration, and the value-laden, adaptive, responsive process of institutionalization. The process of institutionalization is the process of organic growth, wherein the organization adapts to the strivings of internal groups and the values of the external society.

[18] Blase, M. Institution Building: A Source Book. Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities, East Lansing, Michigan, 1973. From a policy point of view, the question is how you decide whether or not an organization induces and protects change.

[19] Moore *et al.* (note 16).

[20] Johnston, A., "Att utveckla en institution", in Wohlgemuth, L. and Carlsson, J. (eds.), *Förvaltning, Ledarskap, Institutionsutveckling – på Afrikas villkor*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1996.

Evaluation of capacity building requires a concept which can be transformed into a concrete and usefulness tool for analysis and evaluation. Cohen is highly critical of how development aid increasingly links capacity building to institutional development. He argues that any attempt to define capacity building in terms of institutions and/or organizations will yield a concept that is difficult to operationalize and difficult to apply in project design. If capacity building is focused to address the needs of individuals, rather than the problems of building institutions, the situation will improve greatly.[21]

Still, a single focus on the individual is too narrow a perspective. The effectiveness by which individuals utilize their capacities does not take place in a vacuum. People use their capacities in a societal context. Someone has to demand the skills and capacities of individuals for their potential benefits to be utilized. This highlights the important role of what Dia calls the demand for technical capacities.[22] The major "customers" are the organizations and institutions in a country. Institutional capacities focus on the ability of the country to make optional use of existing individual capacities and resources in a sustainable manner. They provide the arrangements necessary for the realization of individual capacities. The effectiveness of their demand is a key variable for making best use of the capacities of individuals. In other words, for a full understanding of the problems surrounding the formation of human capital, one needs to consider both the supply side of capacity building (the individuals) and the demand for those capacities (the institutions).

This analytical perspective—focusing on the supply of and demand for capacities—forms the point of departure for how we would like to design an evaluation model of SAREC's support to research networks. We return to this in section 9 below.

4. International experiences of capacity building and regional cooperation

Support to build research capacities in Africa has mainly been undertaken on a bilateral basis. However, a number of regional efforts have also been made, both by bilateral and multilateral agencies. In most cases, the rationale for providing regional support is similar to SAREC's: the research in question does not receive the right kind of internal support, or is not given sufficient priority by the country receiving bilateral aid. Thus, regional cooperation can be of great importance when conditions for building national research capacities are lacking.

Among the various research areas where capacities are lacking, each donor selects its own priority area. Sida has chosen social sciences, Germany has chosen agriculture, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

[21] Cohen (note 4).

[22] Dia (note 7).

has chosen education, and the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) has chosen economics.

This approach was promoted and developed by the World Bank in its study on education in Africa in the late 1980's. The study concluded that available funds for education in many countries in Africa had become so scarce that certain universities could not be sustained in whole or part, and should therefore be organized on a regional level. As it was being prepared, the study was widely discussed in Africa and among donors, and its conclusions were widely contested (to the point of provoking a student strike in Harare). In its final version the conclusions were slightly revised, but the idea of Centres of Excellence had been tabled and continued to influence the debate in the early 1990's.

The issue came to a head in the preparation of the African Capacity Building Initiative, which later became the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF). At the request of the World Bank, a group of senior African researchers had identified the lack of indigenous skills in analysing and implementing economic policies as the major bottleneck to increased political and economic independence in Africa. They proposed the creation of a new institution to take on a large training programme to develop research capacity. The World Bank, together with the African Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), agreed to sponsor such a programme and, together with a group of Africa researcher, developed the idea into a functioning project. Discussions with other presumptive donors centred on the question of whether this regional effort should concentrate on developing local capacities or on supporting the development of Centres of Excellence in each sub-region. After tense discussions, the parties agreed on the first option.

Thus, regional support has been discussed continuously and has received considerable support over the past decades. Initially, UNESCO played a central role in promoting and steering international support in this direction. But UNESCO's involvement has waned in the past ten years, despite the efforts of several countries. Instead, the World Bank and, in recent years, the IIEP have assumed leading roles in focusing international support.

As a result of discussions initiated by the World Bank Education Report, a special body gathering donors and African educationalists was established. The original name, Donors to African Education, has since been changed to the Association for the Development of African Education. Several working groups have been set up, among them one that deals with research and research capacity building, and another that deals with higher education. These are currently the most interesting fora for discussions on strategy and policy.

On a more practical level, most donors are involved in one way or another with support to research on a regional level. For the purposes of this study, a short presentation is made of the experiences of IIEP, Germany and the Netherlands. The types of projects supported by these donors are very similar, and the large

networks discussed and evaluated in sections 6 and 7 below are supported by most donors.

Thus, in discussions leading up to the formation of ACBF, most donors agreed on the concept of developing local capacities. However, regional research cooperation is still mostly done via an available institute or university faculty in the sub-region in question. From these nodes, support is channelled to similar institutions/faculties in the region. AERC is a case in point and has chosen several economic faculties in anglophone Africa, save Nigeria and South Africa, as focal points for its collaborative masters programme. Similarly, Germany, through GTZ, has chosen Lusaka and Harare for its postgraduate training and research collaboration in agriculture in SADC.[23]

Holland lists 16 activities dealing with capacity building in its bi-annual report on research and development cooperation 1993–94. Support covers activities ranging from AERC and the African Association of Universities (AAU) to supporting environmental impact assessment training and research in Burkina Faso for six countries in the region, under above-mentioned GTZ.

Increasingly these efforts by other donors are being supplemented by what is usually called networking. This is described by IIEP in the following way:

> Several institutions . . . are involved in training and research in educational planning and management. They have long-standing experience in assisting government in strengthening planning and management capacities. Some have been involved in organizing regional and international activities. However, the level of communication among the institutions is generally poor and there is no established mechanism for exchanging experiences. The creation of synergy among the institutions through increased interaction and co-operation is therefore necessary. One way of doing this is to bring those institutions together into a network. Such a network could effectively harness the capacity-building potential available within the region at a moment when there is an increasing demand for training education managers.[24]

These are networks based on collaboration between established national institutions. Other types of networks are based on individual cooperation, where a specialized networking body has been created for the sole purpose of managing the network.

Over the years, IIEP has helped to establish institution-based networks in educational research in different parts of Africa. A similar network for overall training and research in educational planning and management capacities has recently been established in Asia, and such networks are also planned for anglophone as well as francophone Africa. The aim of these networks is rather to facilitate bilateral contact between partners than to organize large-scale multilateral activities. Typical activities include exchange publications and

[23] Currently this programme offers a M.Sc. in Crop Sciences at the University of Zambia, and a M.Sc. in Agricultural Economics at the University of Zimbabwe.

[24] IIEP, Newsletter, vol. XIV, no. 1.

information (in particular on programmes), examine the possibilities of arranging personnel exchanges and other joint activities, publishing joint newsletters and organizing meetings.

Most major efforts to develop regional research capacities are supported by bilateral donors. Their experiences are similar to those presented in the SAREC evaluations analysed in this report. In most cases, the projects seem to function well and accomplish what is expected of them. The short-term objectives appear to be well met. However, when it comes to the long-term objectives of sustainability, financial and technical survival and, to a certain extent, impact (i.e., the actual use of the research), problems are very common. Also the smaller, bilaterally supported activities seem to have met the same challenges and problems. These problems are normally not connected with the projects *per se*, but are more consequences of institutional weaknesses at the national level. Below summarize the major issues affecting sustainability that have been identified in the international development debate.

Experience indicates that in order to secure long-term , sustainable results from a development input, a holistic view of institutional development is necessary. If any part of the whole is ignored, other input will only be effective to a limited extent. One of the authors of this report has developed this reasoning further in a recent study of the basic needs of running the Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in Mozambique.[25]

Today, UEM receives only USD 4.5 million from the state budget to conduct education and research. The UEM has 5,200 students and approximately 2,000 employees (of whom 700 are teachers). Aid only marginally covers running costs—most of it goes to cover capital costs, technical assistance, linkages and heavier equipment. The lack of funds for running costs results in salaries and scholarships being so low that teachers and students must complement them by other means. There is a shortage of study material of all kinds, there are no local funds available for research, buildings are falling into disrepair and there is a lack of everything needed for daily operations. The funds scheduled for running costs would need to be raised to a calculated USD 16 million to make the situation acceptable.

The conclusion is that if institutional capacity building is to be pursued at the university, it is necessary, parallel to other concerns, to ensure that those who comprise the institution and are responsible for the day-to-day running of its activities, receive sufficient incentive for their work and that the environment in which they are to function is satisfactory.

As a rule, financiers assume that the government of the recipient country will provide funds for running costs through the state budget. Commitments to this effect are often made, but despite the fact that the necessary funds do not materialize, aid donors continue to give their support. This is an untenable

[25] Wohlgemuth, L., "The UEM, Mocambique— basic needs for efficient running", mimeo, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1995.

position, and one which is worsened when donors, such as Germany in the examples referred to above, temporarily top up salaries to staff in "their" projects.

We share the view of other analysts that, for the foreseeable future, Mozambique will be unable to provide the necessary minimum funding for the efficient running of UEM and other similar institutions or state activities. If it is maintained that running costs are the recipient country's responsibility, no support to institutional development or capacity building of any kind should be provided when such funds do not materialize. Thus, if long-term institutional cooperation is to take place, a holistic view of the institutions, that incorporates the costs required for their operating expenditures, is necessary

This reasoning is generally applicable to all institutional development, whether aid is involved or not. The situation in Mozambique can be seen as extreme, and the university as a special case. However, even in relatively well off countries, as Namibia and Zimbabwe, the years since independence have seen the establishment of a great number of institutions that remain under-financed from the point of view of current expenditures.

The situation in not all that different in South Africa. As a result of strong political pressures, to which the Government is forced to respond, decisions are easily taken to create new or expand existing institutions, without much regard of the resources required to operate them. In South Africa, the question of running costs will perhaps become even more important than in other countries. Whereas it can be claimed that in a poor country, such as Mozambique, there are special reasons for financing these costs with aid funds, there can never be any question of outside financing in a country as well off as South Africa.

Within the framework of running costs, salaries and other incentives constitute perhaps both the most important and the most difficult question. Salaries represent the bulk of the costs for running an institution. To sustain operations, at many institutions the salaries that are paid out are no longer sufficient to cover living costs even for high-level civil servants. As a result, many civil servants—often the most competent—leave the universities, in the best case for the private sector or a similar job in a neighbouring country, in the worst case for Europe or the USA. The accepted number is that currently around 100,000 well-educated Africans from sub-Saharan Africa are working outside Africa, while as many "experts" from Europe and USA are working in Africa.[26]

In such situations, institutional development becomes even more difficult. What in fact happens is that expensive foreign experts are contracted to "advise and teach" the recipient faculty and/or department, while the department's own personnel disappear as soon as they are fully trained. To tackle this problem, ACBF has chosen as its special strategy to support, as an experiment, smaller institutions (Policy Analysis Units) with relatively great autonomy from the state and with the possibility of determining their own salaries. Such PAUs have been

[26] Berg (note 8).

set up in a number of African countries. The limited experience thus far indicates that even educated Africans presently working in Europe can be convinced to go back to their country of origin by being offered relatively modest salaries on which it is possible to live.

A more general challenge, which every effort to build research capacity will have to face, is the question of ownership. To become sustainable, the institution where capacity building is to take place must be firmly established in the country in question. Overall rules and regulations must be conducive to long-term development of the institution. The overall political and administrative leadership, as well as the institution staff, must be made responsible for long-term development. Neither the donor representatives, nor the regional headquarters or focal point, can assume that responsibility. Where local leadership has been missing, no sustainable capacities have ever been developed.

What emerges from this survey of international experiences is that the issues of impact and sustainability are perhaps the most important aspect of capacity building efforts. The effectiveness, in broad terms, of research capacity building seems to be closely linked to institutional capacity in the research institutions concerned.

5. Nine evaluations of SAREC-supported research networks

The following evaluations had been selected by Sida–UTV to be included in the sample study:

1. Thorbecke, E., *The AERC Research Programme: an evaluation*, 1996.
2. Christensen, J. and McCall, M. K., *AFREPREN: The African Energy Policy Research Network*, 1994.
3. Hassan, F. A., *Urban Origins in Eastern Africa (UOEA)*, 1993.
4. Lundgren, B., Brinck, P., Birgegård, L.-E., Ericsson, L. and Khalili, M., *Swedish Support to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)*, 1994.
5. de Vylder, S. and Hjort af Ornäs, A., *Social Science in Africa: The Role of CODESRIA in Pan-African Cooperation*, 1991.
6. Sawyerr, A. and Hydén, G., *SAPES Trust: The First 5 Years*, 1993.
7. Marope, M., Molokomme, A. and Talle, A., *Evaluation of SAREC's Women's Research Programme in Africa*, 1995.
8. Rudengren, J., Brinck, P., Davy, B. and Hedlund, C., *Sida/SAREC's Marine Science Programmes*, 1996.
9. Hydén, G., Meillassoux, C., Ndulu, B. and Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Strategies for the Future of Africa*, 1989

These projects share many common features, but are also different in important respects. The networks cover different academic disciplines, but most of them

are found within the social sciences. Some of the projects - Marine science, Urban origins, AFREPREN and the Women´s research programme - consists of a network of researchers and/or institutions that have teamed up to conduct research on a specific topic. Others, such as CGIAR, Codesria, AERC, SAPES and the Third World Foundation, are more of regional organisations. They are all concerned with building and maintaining different research networks. These networks then operates under the auspices of the regional organisation. It is probably fair to describe them as regional organisers of networks.

6. The format of the evaluations

Three programmes had been evaluated at least once before by SAREC, for five of them this was the first time, while in one case it was difficult to determine what had actually happened before. All evaluations but one were conducted while the projects were ongoing. The evaluations did not specifically indicate the time available to the teams. On the basis of the size of the teams and the information they provided, we estimate that the average evaluation involved less than 3 man-months of work and one journey outside Europe. In three cases (4, 8, 9) We felt that the time involved could have been more than 12 weeks totally for the whole team. The evaluation was rarely part of the project. It was initiated and decided on by SAREC when it felt that the time was appropriate.

The size of the evaluation team varied between 1 and 5 persons (the average was 2.5). The teams usually had strong sector competence, and often included representatives of the region concerned. Presumably as part of SAREC's evaluation policy, SAREC staff members did not participate in the evaluations. The team members were all men, except in the project under review that addressed gender issues.

The evaluations are quite similar in their basic disposition. All are written in English and most include the Terms of Reference of the respective evaluation, either annexed or summarized in an introductory chapter. On the other hand, few include the work plan of the evaluation. In most cases, the organization of the work is only briefly described. Although the evaluations were commissioned by SAREC, the TORs raise questions of relevance not only to SAREC—the recommendations made seems to be of equal interest to the beneficiary. None of the evaluations contain examples of questionnaires or interview formats used. In most of the evaluations, the data used is almost invariably presented in processed form. The data is mainly taken from secondary sources, but in a few cases the evaluators process their own primary data. However, only in one case was this raw data presented.

In general, the evaluations gave little attention to methodological issues. There was hardly any discussion of the validity and reliability of the results. None of the evaluations made any use of formal analytical techniques, either quantitative, such as a cost-benefit analysis, or qualitative, such as an explicit

participatory evaluation methodology. As for data gathering, the methodologies were fairly similar. Five made specific use of agency documents (earlier evaluations and other relevant project and country documents available at headquarters), while four made no or little use of such documents. It was more common to use documents available at project headquarters: financial reports, annual reports and, most importantly, research material published by the project. Agency personnel were interviewed only to a limited extent. The most common interview objects were project staff, followed by the intended beneficiaries, i.e., the researchers themselves. None of the evaluations made any reference to or contacted other donors, to include their experiences from similar projects. Given the nature of supported activities, it was not relevant to make direct observation of project work. In some cases, however, the evaluators participated in conferences where issues of vital importance for the project were discussed.

Would efforts to develop research capacity have fared better, or differently, had the projects not been undertaken, either with or without support from SAREC or any other donor? Such with/without analyses were not attempted. However, all nine evaluations are formulated to imply that the situation would have been worse had not the respective projects been undertaken. None of the evaluations spend much time on analyses of either project expenditures or project efficiency. This is in part explained by the respective TORs, which do not always require such analyses. When cost-effectiveness analyses are attempted, the results are not very positive. SAREC's performance is not a big issue in any of the evaluations. If and when SAREC's performance is mentioned, it is usually in positive terms. None of the evaluations include a discussion of lessons learned. In general, the evaluations are mainly concerned with the project and its positive and negative aspects. There are only limited attempts to generalize from the findings.

Let us look at how the nine evaluations address a few cross-cutting issues of relevance to each project. *Gender* is given exemplary treatment in one evaluation (7) but receives little attention in the other eight. *Environment* is given exemplary treatment in one evaluation (8), is adequately addressed in two (2, 4), receives a minimum of attention in three (7, 5, 6) and is not discussed at all in remaining three. *Human rights* and *democracy* receive little attention. To the extent they are discussed, references occur in two contexts: in listings of research areas and in discussions of the extent to which the research may impact on human rights and democracy. *Market economics* is only addressed in the context of structural adjustment policies.

7. A Summary of experiences

According to the TORs, the evaluations were to be assessed using Sida's criteria for aid evaluation:[27]

[27] Sida, Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit, *Sida's Evaluation Policy*, Stockholm: Sida,

Relevance: Can the efforts be justified in terms of regional research needs and of Sida's and the recipient countries' priorities in the particular areas of research?

Goal fulfilment: Have established programme goals been met? Can this be measured in a satisfactory way? How is goal fulfilment assessed in the evaluations?

Impact: What has been the impact of the support? Have there been any effects – positive or negative not foreseen by the projects?

Cost-effectiveness: Is the input reasonably proportionate to the outcome? Are the projects cost-effective? Do the evaluations discuss more cost-effective ways of achieving the stated goals? If so, which are they?

Sustainability: Do the evaluations discuss sustainability? What is their assessment of the programmes' sustainability? On what do they base their assessment? Do some types of regional research cooperation yield more sustainable results than others?

Rather than analysing each evaluation in turn, we have chosen to organize the analysis around these criteria. This is more appropriate, as it facilitates a comprehensive picture of how a particular criteria has been dealt with by the evaluators. The reader should be reminded that we are evaluating the evaluation's analysis of each of these criteria. We have tried our best to make a clear distinction between our conclusions and those of the evaluators.

Relevance

Do the evaluations analyse whether the projects were given sufficient priority by the recipient countries? Similarly, do they discuss the countries' need for the projects?

All projects involve regional research networks encompassing more than one country. Analysing need, or relevance, on a country-by-country basis did not seem to be realistic option. The projects themselves, and the evaluators, preferred to focus the discussion on the regional, or even continental, level. Thus, the discussions of needs are removed from the national context and assume some generic qualities.

To a large extent, the AERC focuses on the individual economist and the building of his capacity through networking. As such, the AERC has been quite successful. It has, among other things, established an "amazing esprit de corps" among researchers and network participants.[28] On a general level, it is always possible to argue that an activity that produces well-trained economists is always relevant. Still, this is too simplistic a measure. And AERC has also a special objective to produce policy-relevant research. An earlier evaluation concluded

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1995.

[28] AERC, p. 61

that the policy relevance of the research proposals were not always adequately considered. Intra-disciplinary criteria seemed to predominate when designing and assessing research proposals.[29] This was in spite of the substantial need for policy advice in Africa. African policy makers and other external actors could not effectively make their voice heard in the AERC research process. "External" considerations were taken care of only to the extent that the participants of the network voiced national or regional priorities.

This evaluation is more positive and notes the achievements made by AERC in encouraging policy-relevant research. But extent to which the activities of the AERC are relevant to the region, nation, or the donor agencies financing the network, is a more difficult question. The AERC evaluation does not address this issue. It is primarily concerned with the internal research process of the AERC network. This naturally limits the discussion of the AERC initiative in a regional and/or national framework.[30]

AFREPREN—the African energy policy research network—resembles in many ways the case of AERC. Its relevance derives from the crisis in the energy sector in Africa and the need for research that helps decision-makers to devise policies to improve the situation. The evaluation concludes that AFREPREN has not really succeeded in producing research which is relevant for the 16 member-countries in terms of policy and planning. This is partly because of natural reasons: a shortage of African energy researchers made it natural for AFREPREN to focus on building individual capacities before addressing policy issues.[31]

The relevance of the archaeological project —Urban Origins in Eastern Africa (UOEA)—is largely explained in terms of its importance for African nation-building. There was a felt need to question the cultural evolutionary model developed in Europe and to establish the contributions of indigenous people to the cultural dynamics of pre-history Africa. For Africa to develop this knowledge, there was a need for trained archaeologists. By training them, the project acquired its relevance.[32]

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[29] The point is made in a study made by a consultant presented at the December 1994 Research Workshop of the AERC.

[30] This is not the most recent evaluation of AERC. In May 1996, David Henderson and John Loxley submitted their evaluation, *The African Economic Research Consortium: an Evaluation and Review*. Unfortunately, it was not made available to us until after the finalizing of our study. After reading their report, we conclude that it contains a more expanded discussion of AERC's links with African policymakers and the African universities than Thorbecke. Thus, it focus more on impact than Thorbecke. In particular, it provides some interesting insights into the collaboration between AERC and universities in the Collaborative MA Programme.The authors are generally very positive to the quality of the links established between AERC and the universities. For the so called Category B universities, the authors are explicit about the short- to medium-term impact of the AERC. However, the report does not contain any substantial discussion about sustainability.

[31] AFREPREN, pp. 7–10.

[32] UOEA, pp. 51–52.

The CGIAR is a large international network for agricultural research of particular relevance for developing countries. The evaluation discusses the issue of relevance quite thoroughly within the context of the role of agriculture in development. Development is dependent on an efficient agriculture, where scientific research in particular plays an important role. The relevance of the project derives from this chain of logic.[33]

The relevance of the support to CODESRIA is derived from the generally poor situation of social sciences in Africa. This is discussed in some detail in the first section of the evaluation. The current situation and overall environment in which CODESRIA was borne can be described in a few key words: a lack of scientific traditions; problems of funding and dependence; atomization and dispersion; repression and self-censorship; and lack of outlets and distribution channels for research results. Any organization which sets itself the task of combating these problems must be regarded as relevant from a development perspective.[34]

The relevance of the support to the SAPES Trust is explained by the evaluators in terms of the generally difficult and marginal position of social science research in southern and eastern Africa. The following quote illustrates the point made by the evaluators:

> The absence of indigenous institutions and traditions of the sort required to cope with the emergent needs of new nations of the region constituted a very severe limitation on their development prospects. Of relevance in this regard was the underdevelopment of the social sciences. The region lagged behind other parts of Africa in the maturity of its indigenous social science research capacity, and could boast of no authentic regional scholarship of scholarly community. The situation was worsened by the 1980's African phenomenon of declining university-based social science research resulting from heavy teaching loads, poor remuneration and incentive structures, under-funding of research, and constricted outlets for the dissemination of the results of such research as gets done.[35]

If SAPES could help alleviate this situation and assist in establishing a community and tradition of social science research in the region, the relevance of SAPES would be beyond doubt.

The relevance of supporting a network for gender research, as SAREC has done through the Women's Research Programme (WRP) in Africa, is not explicitly discussed in the evaluation. Still, throughout the text there are frequent formulations suggesting the relevance of research on gender issues for Africa's general development. For Africa, increased knowledge and awareness of gender issues forms an important input into processes of societal change and development. In the specific context of the research community, the support is

[33] CGIAR, section 3.3, pp. 24–26.

[34] CODESRIA, chapter 1.

[35] SAPES Trust, p. 20.

relevant in that it can help improve the marginalized position of researchers interested in gender issues. For SAREC, supporting gender research is relevant since it is closely linked to important objectives for Swedish development aid.

The marine science programme in East Africa was begun in the mid-1980's, which was timely as there was a growing realization of the potential contribution of research to sustainable development. The relevance of the marine science programme in East Africa is high for the following reason:

> Most of the world's major cities are located in the coastal area, and the largest share (60%) of the worlds population live within this zone; a share which is predicted to increase to over 75% of the world's population by the year 2020. Globally misuse of coastal resources is widespread. If allowed to continue unabated, resource mismanagement of coastal areas will most likely lead to depletion, pollution and eventual destruction of this critical ecosystem.[36]

The evaluation of the programme "Strategies for the future of Africa" concludes that the work of the Third World Forum is highly relevant to the long-term development concerns of the African continent. There is a need for alternative positions in a world dominated by short-term crisis management strategies favoured by donors, notably the World Bank and the IMF, as well as national governments.[37]

Goal fulfilment

As regards goal fulfilment, a common pattern soon emerges. Focus in all evaluations is on the achievement of immediate goals, such as number of people trained, books and articles published, etc. More long-term goals, such as impact on the status of social sciences, the formulation of environmental policies and regulations, etc., are discussed much more briefly.

The principal objective of the AERC is to strengthen local capacity for economic research in sub-Saharan Africa. This mainly refers to individual capacity building. As such it has been a considerable success. The evaluators measured goal fulfilment by reading the major publications of the network, surveying references to reviews in internationally reputable journals. They also note that the research process itself contained effective mechanisms – in particular, a system for peer review – for controlling the quality of project proposals. Less attention seems to have been given in the project of the policy relevance of the supported research. This could possibly reflect different opinions within the AERC as to whether policy relevant research really was one of the AERC objectives. The evaluators argue that the situation improved over time.

The experiences of AFREPREN are in many ways similar to those of the AERC. The programme's key objective can be summarized as: "strengthening local research capacity and to harnessing it in the service of energy-policy making and

[36] Marine Science, p. 1.

[37] TWF, p. 3.

planning". The evaluation concludes that the network has been successful in addressing the first aspect on capacity building while the impacts on planning and policy making have been more modest. The method for measuring objectives achievement was the same as in the AERC evaluation.[38]

The fundamental objective of the UOEA has been to contribute scientifically to our knowledge of urban origins in Eastern Africa. The more immediate objectives were: (*a*) to stimulate the creation of a network of scientific contacts between colleagues in East Africa and Sweden; (*b*) assist in the training of a new generation of archaeological researchers in Africa; and (*c*) strengthen technical facilities for research and the dissemination of research findings.[39]

The evaluation finds that all of these objectives have been met, and that the foundation for achieving the larger development objective has been laid. The methodology used for arriving at this conclusion is based on an examination of documents produced and on interviews with project management and the researchers involved. A specific questionnaire was used for this purpose but is not reproduced in the evaluation report.[40]

The ultimate objective of the CGIAR is to improve nutrition and economic well-being for low-income people. The research should also contribute to greater equity in the distribution of income, improve the quality of plant and animal products, achieve sustainability and stability in their supply, and enhance the natural resource base. These goals are in keeping with key objectives for Swedish development aid. As such they are difficult to evaluate. At the level of international agricultural research systems (IARS), and national agricultural research systems (NARS), it is a different matter altogether. Goals are (or at least should be) concrete, specific and suitable for evaluation. The complication arises because of the sheer number of IARS, no to mention NARS. It will never be possible to arrive at an aggregated conclusion as regards goal fulfilment. It can only be done at the level of the individual institute. Here support can be stopped or continued depending on performance.

The evaluation is, of course, confronted with these methodological problems—especially as it addresses the highest level of the CGIAR system. Instead of attempting to review all the participating centres. the evaluators chose to focus more on "system-wide issues". This means that there is little discussion of goal fulfilment. The evaluators nevertheless put forward opinions on the system's performance. While they are positive to its achievements, the conclusions lack an empirical base. [41]

[38] AFREPREN, pp. 15–16.

[39] UOEA, p. 9.

[40] UOEA, p. 33–37

[41] An evaluation from 1985 seems to have been particulary important with regard to the analysis of goal fulfilment.

The overall objective of CODESRIA is to support the African social science community. More specifically, the objective is to promote the indigenization of African social sciences; strengthen collaboration among African social scientists; facilitate an exchange and dissemination of information and research results; and defend academic freedom and promote a free flow of ideas across geographic, linguistic, cultural and political borders. Furthermore, CODESRIA has been committed to a critical perspective, that is, to applying a sceptical attitude towards the validity and relevance of mainstream social sciences. The primary means to achieve these objectives have been networking activities, through which the support is extended to multinational and national working groups.[42]

A major conclusion from the evaluation of CODESRIA was that it had made important contributions to the development of African social sciences. The work carried out by the Secretariat and the various committees and individuals was found both relevant and efficient. The evaluation does not evaluate each of CODESRIA's objectives, probably because they are of such a nature that they are difficult to evaluate with some precision. The evaluation notes, however, as CODESRIA's main achievements that: it has helped counteract tendencies towards fragmentation and dispersion of African social sciences; it has helped improve the quantity and quality of African social sciences research; it has been complementary rather than competitive *vis-à-vis* established academic institutions; and it has been a strong element of training in research, particularly benefiting junior researchers; and taken an active stand on a number of issues related to democracy, which have had some influence outside the academic world.

There are also shortcomings. The evaluators found that the dissemination of research results is weak. The quality of the research published is too uneven. (This may be compared with the results achieved by AERC through its stringent quality control). It is highly dependent on a few foreign (donor) agencies. It does not represent lusophone Africa very well. Finally, its function is dependent on a limited number of scholars.

SAPES and CODESRIA have much in common. Their objectives are quite similar. For SAPES, important objectives were: (*a*) to promote the emergence of a strong indigenous scholarly community and tradition; (*b*) to contribute to an increase in the volume, quality and relevance of social science research and publications in and about the region; and (*b*) to contribute to the emergence of an authentic southern African social science. The method chosen for achieving these objectives was networking, which was seen as the most effective method for bringing together and making the best use of the limited resources available in the region.

According to the evaluation, SAPES has achieved these objectives. Numerous conferences have been organized, research networks have been created, a library has been started, a visiting fellowship programme was started, contacts have

[42] CODESRIA, pp. iii–vi.

been established with international research institutions, and a publishing company has been set up. Through these activities, SAPES has contributed to the revival and sustenance of social science research, by attracting and supporting researchers who may otherwise have found the trials of conducting research too grim in Africa of the 1980's and early 1990's.[43]

The Women's Research Programme (WRP) has the objective of promoting and strengthening gender research within university institutions and research networks in Africa and Latin America. This is linked to the ultimate aim of SAREC to introduce a gender perspective into all research assistance. To attain this goal, it is necessary to increase researchers' competence in the area of gender studies. Initially linked to individual capacity building, the WRP later developed its objectives towards building and developing institutions favourable to gender studies. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess how, and to what extent, the SAREC grant has contributed to advance gender studies. The evaluation looked at the WRP in six countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The evaluation method used can be described as a combination of interviews with researchers involved in the programme and reading of research reports, articles, etc., published by the researchers at the respective institutions.

Were the objectives achieved? After examining progress at the institutions and networks receiving support, as well as after reading the research documents, the evaluators' conclusion is generally positive. In most cases, the institutions and networks supported by SAREC managed to utilize their funds adequately and to establish important milieus for gender research. It also became apparent that a major problem of gender research was to gain acceptance in mainstream academia. Regarding the quality of research, the evaluation found that the researchers would benefit from more practice in conducting research. They also noted, a bit worringly, that for many contributors this may be the first and only research papers. There was also a heavy bias towards quantitative research methods, which the evaluators regard as a weakness. Finally, they conclude that it is difficult to assess the improvement of the research done, as most documents are produced within a short time span and by different authors. An important conclusion of the evaluators is that thematic networks appear to be a powerful instrument for promoting gender research.[44]

The evaluators of the marine science programme are careful to point out that they are not able to conduct a traditional evaluation. Analysis of goal fulfilment, output and cost-effectiveness requires that goals that lend themselves to some kind of measurement. This was not the case in this programme. The evaluators were therefore forced to try to reconstruct what could have been reasonable goals. Following discussions with SAREC and involved scientists, two long-term goals were established: (*a*) to build a sustainable marine science institutional

[43] SAPES. p. 12 and 23.

[44] WRP, pp. 61–63.

capacity in Tanzania, Mozambique and the East African region; and (*b*) to establish a process of local, national and regional research priority setting, based on the needs for a sustainable marine ecosystem for East Africa.[45]

The evaluation was based on documentation of the marine programmes, scientific reports produced, and extensive discussions with persons involved. These discussions were conducted in a semi-structured manner where the team attempted to establish the following: (*a*) achievements in the areas of capacity building, research management, etc., (*b*) the role of SAREC in this process; (*c*) the relation to other donor activities; (*d*) linkages to other scientific/research activities, policy initiatives, etc., in this area; (*e*) the development of government support to this area; and (*f*) the short-, medium- and long-term goals of the evaluated programmes.

The evaluation concludes that in terms of capacity building, the programmes have recorded important achievements. The training activities have yielded significant results in terms of the number of graduate and post-graduate degrees awarded. The institutions involved have been strengthened considerably in terms of capacity. The scientific results, however, are less impressive. They are mainly descriptive of the status of the resources.[46]

The programme "Strategies for the Future of Africa" lists the following major objectives: (*a*) to undertake high-level analytical research to highlight the development problematic in Africa, its causes and alternative strategies for the future; (*b*) to engender constructive debate on this problematic in an endeavour to induce desired change; (*c*) to contribute to the creation of a strong and independent research capacity on the continent, and form a core of African researchers capable of using appropriate and potent methodologies supportive of the development process is important; and (*d*) to contribute to the training of young and upcoming scholars through research networking and wide dissemination o quality research output.[47]

The methodology of the evaluation is clearly presented and is based on four blocks: first, an evaluation of the scientific quality of research publications; second, an assessment of effectiveness of dissemination, primarily through interviews with potential readers and distributors of publications; third, an evaluation of the programme's contribution to building research capacity, mainly through interviews; and fourth, the contribution of the programme to the training of younger African scholars. The last block focused on two things: the extent of participation by scholars in the network (assessed through interviews with network co-ordinators and participating researchers), and training institutions' access to research output.

[45] Marine science, p. 4.

[46] Marine science, pp.8–10.

[47] TWF, p. 11.

What were the achievements of the programme, according to the evaluation? The programme's success has mainly been the production of critical literature on the African development problematique. It is the opinion of the evaluators that the programme has contributed significantly to Africa's long term socio-economic development process, by providing a basis for critical debate on development. The programme has also been successful in the creation of a core of scientific researchers with methodological capabilities and commitment to people-based development analysis. The programme has been less successful in terms of impact. The evaluation points particularly on the weak dissemination of research results. The programme and its findings are simply not very well known among academics and policy makers in Africa.

Impact

The links between the AERC and departments of economics at various national universities are not extensively discussed—mainly because this was not part of the TOR of the evaluation.[48]

The evaluation of AFREPREN is more explicit in this regard. It points out that the network has been oriented more towards individual capacity building than towards institutional development. Where institutions are strengthened, they are closely associated with the activities of individual members.[49]

The impact of the UOEA is not explicitly discussed in the evaluation, although there are frequent references to two kinds of impact. First, there is the possible impact on society from an improved knowledge of is early history. This point is frequently referred to, but never really substantiated. Second, there is the programme's impact on local institutions. African institutions have benefited from collaboration both with other African institutions and with Sweden. The type of benefits accruing from these interchanges are described in the evaluation. Presumably, these results are derived from questionnaires and interviews—this is not made very clear in the evaluation. Findings from the data set are presented in an exploratory manner.[50]

The CGIAR evaluation is primarily concerned with the superstructure of the network. It does not enter into any detailed discussion of the situation at national levels. This approach makes it difficult to assess impact. At the highest level in the CGIAR system, one would expect impact in terms of research results influencing the capacity of IARS to conduct qualified research. At the next level down, one would expect IARS to have an impact, through training, etc., on the capacity of NARS. Finally, at the ground level, there would be an impact from research on farm output and productivity. Without recourse to any sophisticated or elaborated method, the evaluation does a reasonable job of discussing impact at the IARS level. The analysis is based on a qualified discussion by experienced

[48] The reader is referred to comments made in footnote 31.

[49] AFREPREN, pp. 33–37.

[50] UOEA, pp. 39–41.

and professional evaluators, with some support from existing documentation. Impact at the level of the individual NARS and the farm is not really addressed. The evaluators largely limit themselves to citing a previous impact evaluation from 1985.[51]

The evaluation of CODESRIA contains an understanding of impact that leads to some confusion. The term is used in a way that overlaps with an understanding of objectives achievement. A quote may illustrate the problem:

> It is difficult to measure the impact of CODESRIA. The few quantitative indicators that can be used, and that have been presented in earlier chapters—such as number of publications distributed, number of seminars and workshops organized, number of junior and senior researchers benefiting from CODESRIA grants or services, etc.,—give only a rough indication of CODESRIA's activities.[52]

This terminological confusion aside, the impact analysis is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative material. Most important among the quantitative data are figures regarding the distribution of research results. The evaluation concludes that outside a small group of insiders, CODESRIA is probably little known. Hence, impact can only be low. Add to this the very uneven quality of the research. The impact of CODESRIA outside the scientific community is also assessed as low. This is in spite of CODESRIA's many commendable initiatives in defence of freedom and democracy: "In African mass media, individual members of CODESRIA do participate in the national debate, where political conditions so permit, but the voice of CODESRIA as an organization is seldom heard".[53]

The impact that could be expected from SAPES include improved teaching, research and policy-making in the region. Judgements on impact appear in several places in the evaluation: "SAPES, therefore, is performing a critical role as sponsor and facilitator of social science research, without which the region would be much poorer".[54] The impact of SAPES flagship, the journal *Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly* (SAPEM), is described in the following way: "SAPEM seems to have an effective reach in the region among academics. Its main contribution, in our judgement, has been to foster a regional perspective on crucial issues and encourage a debate on problems that countries in the region have in common"[55]

What impact could one expect from the WRP? The evaluation does not discuss this issue much. The TOR is more focused on more immediate issues, such as assessing institutional capacities and quality of research.

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[51] CGIAR, pp. 96–100.

[52] CODESRIA, p. 61.

[53] CODESRIA, p. 65.

[54] SAPES, p. 39.

[55] SAPES, p. 31.

The expected impact from the support to marine research in East Africa was not formulated clearly by the programmes. One could expect, however, that the increased knowledge would have yielded an impact on environmental policies as well as on the management of the coastal marine resources. To what extent this has been the case is not made clear in the evaluation.

The evaluation of the research programme on "Strategies for the Future of Africa" is quite critical about the low impact of the often high-quality research conducted within the programme. The results are not published and distributed in a very effective way. They are not easily accessible for either African training institutions, academics or policy makers.[56]

Cost-effectiveness

The evaluation of AERC makes an attempt to calculate cost-effectiveness. It does not try to compare AERC with any alternative mode of achieving the same objectives. Instead, it limits itself to establish the cost per active research project from 1989 to 1994/95, and the cost of peer review per researcher. The conclusion is that AERC has, over time, developed some economies of scale that explain the falling unit costs.

The methodological problems confronting a cost-effectiveness analysis are well discussed in the AFREPREN evaluation. It correctly concludes that there is little scope for a serious cost-effectiveness. The evaluators prefers to put forward their own "subjective" views on the matter. Their conclusion is that both the funding level and the results have been reasonable and commensurate.

The analysis of cost-effectiveness of the UOEA is very limited. It is a matter of half a page, which gives very little information.[57]

Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of CGIAR is a daunting, if not impossible, task. The evaluators offers a presentation of expenditures that suggest that such an analysis would be interesting. Total SAREC support up to 1992/93 amounted to SEK 483 million. Including Sida support, the total comes up to half a billion SEK. This is equivalent to 0.35% of Sweden's development aid budget. Sweden's share of the total contribution to the CG budget has nevertheless dropped from 3% at the end of the 1970's to 2% in 1992/93. The evaluators seem convinced that these investments have been well spent.[58]

Five of the evaluations are not required by their TORs to analyse, or even discuss, cost-effectiveness: the evaluations of CODESRIA, the SAPES Trust, the Women's Research Programme, the research programme "Strategies for the Future of Africa" and the marine sciences programme.

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[56] TWF, p.36.

[57] UOEA, p. 45.

[58] CGIAR, pp.106–107

Sustainability

Sustainability is largely not an issue in the evaluations. There are generally no discussions about how the networks should survive. Neither is there any discussion about alternative ways of securing financing to the networks. Furthermore, to what extent the networks can generate their own resources is not discussed at all. The important question of whether—and to what extent—African governments, and their institutions, would be interested in assuming responsibility for these networks receives comparatively more attention. Two evaluations (8, 9) discuss this in an adequate way, three (5, 6, 7) address the issue in a more limited way. Four (1, 2, 3, 4) don't mention the issue at all.

Sustainability in the case of the AERC would mean reducing its total dependence on donor financing. This issue is not at all discussed in the evaluation partly because the TOR of the evaluation does not raise this question. Still, it is a key issue. Who among the African countries now benefiting from the network would be prepared, and able, to fund a research organization a total annual budget of USD 7.8 million (in 1994/95), and where the average research project cost USD 25,000?[59]

The AFREPREN evaluation discusses alternative future scenarios for the network. These concern not only the internal mode of operation of the network, but also issues relating to sustainability. One scenario is the development of AFREPREN into an institution, rather than a network, which would mean a mandate to identify, train and promote younger researchers. Another scenario is for AFREPREN to direct its main support to institutions rather than to individuals. What the evaluation does not discuss is a possible scenario where donor financing is completely withdrawn and AFREPREN is forced to stand on its own.

The UOEA is a research project with a definite end. As such it is arguably different from both AERC and AFREPREN. The latter possess much more of an institutional character, or at least they do not have a specified end. To what extent the results from the UOEA is sustainable depends therefore on the extent to which the trained researchers continue their research and the training of new students and researchers at their home institutions. To what extent this takes place is not discussed by the evaluation. When discussing the future, the evaluators concentrate on how the project could be continued and what new areas should be covered.

CGIAR is similar to the other research networks in this sample in that it is a donor creation. It is different in primarily two ways. First, its organization contains mechanisms for guaranteeing the long-time survival of the CGIAR. If anything else fails, one of the original founders—the World Bank—guarantees its survival. Second, the sheer size of the network makes it difficult to dismantle. The evaluation clearly shows that sustainability—in the sense of creating a research network and activities that can survive without financial resources from donors—has never been an issue. It is not the intention to hand over the

[59] AERC, appendix D, p. 79.

responsibility of the network to anybody else than the donors. CGIAR is a permanent feature, which changes and adapts to new circumstances. It has a beginning, but no discernible end. Sustainability of the network is guaranteed by securing a long-term financial commitment from donors.

According to the evaluation, the sustainability of the support to CODESRIA—understood as the organizations' ability to survive without donor funding—appears to be very limited. Not only is it almost totally dependent on donor funds; the funding pattern is heavily concentrated to a few donors (of which SAREC is the dominant). Attempts to broaden the resource base and include African governments among the contributors has met with limited success. Although the evaluation does not analyse sustainability explicitly, it is all too clear that without aid there will be no CODESRIA.

Much the same arguments goes for the SAPES Trust as well. It is a completely donor-dependent operation, with no chances of surviving without grants from abroad. So far, African governments have shown little interest in providing SAPES with any resources. Sustainability, however, has more than one dimension. The evaluation points to a particularly strong point in SAPES' mode of work. The networking model used means that the research was not initiated, directed and owned by SAPES, but by the individual researchers or their institutions. As a result, SAPES had little or no control over the actual design and quality of the projects. One outcome was too large a variation in research quality. Still, from a sustainability point of view, the model has the advantage that it actively builds up—rather than internalizes—capacities in the traditional institutions of higher education and research.

Sustainability is not directly discussed in the evaluation of the WRP. However, it touches on issues of importance to sustainability. Established institutions, as well as thematic networks, had received support. The starting point was insignificant gender research, and a distinct marginalization within academia for this field of research. If gender research manages to be counted at par with other disciplines, it could more easily generate its own momentum and development. If the support by SAREC contributes to this, it could be seen as a contribution to sustainability.

Regarding sustainability, the evaluation of the marine science programme makes an important point: "[T]he building of a sustainable research capacity has started, but the main ingredient related to this capacity is still missing, namely sufficient domestic financial resources to complement and eventually totally replace international financial assistance".[60] This comment is valid not only for this programme, but for all the other research networks supported by SAREC.

The evaluation of the programme "Strategies for the Future of Africa" does not discuss sustainability. It is quite clear that the programme cannot be sustained without external funding. The Africa Bureau of the Third World Forum does not

[60] Marine sciences, p. 10.

have any internal resources available for maintaining the network. Sustainability is therefore not an issue for the evaluators.

8. Concluding the meta-evaluation

These evaluations have many things in common—format, methodology, etc.—but what is particularly striking is that they all find that the research networks have, on par, been successful. Furthermore, they all recommend donors to continue their financial support.[61]

However, a more careful analysis of the basis for these evaluations lead us to conclude that there is not enough evidence to draw conclusions about the "success" of these networks. What these nine evaluations have told us is that the projects are relevant and that they have achieved their immediate objectives. They do not provide any substantial information on cost-effectiveness, impact or sustainability. Below follows a more comprehensive examination of how, and why, each the five aid evaluation criteria have been handled by the evaluations.

Relevance

Relevance was determined in the evaluations against any or all of the following criteria. The programme:

- increases the supply of trained individuals in areas of key importance for development (individual capacity building);
- contributes to more efficient and effective research institutions (institutional capacity building);
- addresses research issues which are central to the development of Africa (examples are CGIAR, of relevance to agricultural development; and the Third World Foundation, which contributes alternative development scenarios).

Overall, the networks were judged to be highly relevant. However, it's not common to find relevance explicitly assessed in terms of Sida's priority areas. One exception to this is the evaluation of WRP, where relevance is clearly linked to Swedish strategic priorities and the general objectives of Swedish development assistance. This does not mean that the projects would be found less relevant if Sida/SAREC priorities had explicitly been used as a yardstick. We suggest that there are at least two plausible explanations as to why the evaluations rarely discusses relevance within the context of the strategic priorities of Swedish development assistance.

First, the strategic priorities of Sweden, and SAREC, are formulated in quite general terms. They provide ample room for interpretations of relevance. The used relevance criteria are therefore well aligned with the priorities of Swedish

[61] Six of the evaluations have been published by SAREC.

development assistance in general, and those of SAREC in particular. Second, it is possible that the evaluators simply have assumed that the whole appraisal and monitoring process within SAREC would ensure that no project would be supported if it did not fit the strategic priorities of SAREC.

Goal fulfilment

The analysis of goal fulfilment is similar in all evaluations, with respect to both methodology and results. Objectives are generally referred to by the evaluators as "immediate" objectives. If we use the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) terminology, it would be fair to say that this would fall somewhere between "results" and "project purpose". The analyses of the objectives of these research networks are, in other words, linked to very concrete activities, located fairly low down in the intervention logic.

This is also reflected in the basic evaluation method used by the evaluators. There is actually not much difference between the evaluation teams in terms of their methodological approach. They are based on: (*a*) a review of research results—reports, articles, books—produced by the researchers in the projects (the primary purpose here is to review quality); (*b*) interviews with involved researchers and research managers (normally following a format which one of the evaluation teams call semi-structured); and (*c*) reading of agency documents, project files and previous evaluations. The general impression from almost all evaluations is that this analysis has been done in a professional and competent way. This is important when we consider the practical constraints on the evaluation teams. Typically the evaluations were conducted within time frames of 2–5 weeks in total, including a 2-week visit in the field. This means that the evaluators' possibilities to conduct deeper analyses of the projects were restricted.

The networks are considered successful in terms of realising their objectives. People have been trained, and high quality research have often been produced. However, it would seem that many networks have been less effective in terms of distributing their results. It is also important to note that the evaluations are on much less stable ground when it comes to objectives located higher up in the intervention logic. We return to this in the discussion of impact below.

Few evaluation teams complain about vague or badly formulated objectives.[62] This has been a recurrent theme within the aid community, and is linked to the issue of aid effectiveness. It has been suggested several times that donor agencies have not understood the importance of clear and distinct objectives for effective aid. The increasing use within aid agencies of formalized systems for project appraisal, such as the LFA, has developed from this debate. However, none of

[62] The evaluation of the Marine Science programme specifically mentions that the project lacked objectives. The solution for the evaluation team was to reconstruct the objectives based on a careful reading of project documents and interviews with project personnel and SAREC representatives. The subsequent evaluation of the reconstructed objectives revealed that the objectives had been achieved.

these research networks have been appraised and structured according to the LFA method. According to the evaluations, this does not seem to have had any serious negative impact on either the quality of the objectives (in terms of evaluability) or the achievements of the projects.

Impact

None of the evaluations can be seen as impact evaluations in the true sense of the word, even if the term is used in some of the TORs. There are two reasons for this. First, the method which has been used is not well-suited for an evaluation of impact. It is more geared towards assessing the achievement of concrete objectives. Second, the organizational framework of the evaluations have not really permitted an analysis of impact. The time allotted to the evaluation teams is the main constraint for developing a suitable evaluation format. Still, some of the evaluations make an attempt towards analysing impact, and the results are clearly interesting. In general, it would appear that the impact from the projects is low. The exception would seem to be the CGIAR network. According to the evaluation, the research has had a demonstrated impact on agricultural production. Almost all other evaluations, however, conclude that the impact of research results on fellow academics, students and other interested parties, training institutions and policy makers have either been low or non-existent. This is largely explained by a combination of factors. Inefficient dissemination systems and strategies have been identified as an reason for the low impact. Books, articles, etc., are printed in small quantities and are not distributed efficiently.

Some of the networks do have ambitions to have an impact on policy formulation by way of research results. It has been difficult for the evaluators to detect any such impact—either because the research has not been particularly policy relevant, or because the networks have failed to involve policy makers in their activities.

It is not always the case that the networks aim towards strengthening national institutions. Where this is the case, the link between the network and national institutions is not established in a satisfactory way. A good example is the CGIAR, where , according to the evaluation, the impact of the network on NARS is a rather dark area. It is normally implied that if a researcher, for example at a university institution, participates in a successful way in a network, the impact on his home institution will be positive. Thus, it is not clear to what extent the networks have contributed to institutional capacity building at the national level.

What emerges from the impact analyses undertaken in the nine evaluations is a picture of research networks working too much in isolation from the surrounding society. They seem to be the concern of a rather limited group of people. This is in spite of the fact that they have successfully achieved their "immediate" objectives. Thus, there seems to be a gap in the causal link between goal fulfilment the impact.

Cost-effectiveness

Analyses of cost-effectiveness have for some years been seen as important in aid evaluations. They have also been requested in some of our evaluation cases. The experiences from these evaluations are not specific to building research capacity, as they largely correspond to those from other sectors as well.

In general, it is safe to say that cost-effectiveness analyses of aid projects are methodologically weak. They often suffer from lack of comparative data, and they rarely contributes anything of value to the assessment of the projects in question. This is certainly the case in the nine SAREC evaluations. The data requirements of a cost-effectiveness analysis, in spite of its apparent theoretical simplicity, are quite demanding. A proper cost-effectiveness analysis requires preparation already *ex ante* in the project cycle—a costly and sometimes impossible task to undertake *ex post*. Data need to be made available already at project start, and to be arranged in the proper way.

The methodological requirements of a cost-effectiveness analysis are therefore demanding. Few aid projects manage to fulfil them, which leads to meaningless analyses. In this perspective, it should be pointed out that a good expenditure analysis quite often can be just as useful as a cost-effectiveness analysis. Unless the requirements of a cost-effectiveness analysis are taken seriously in project design, it must be questioned whether it is relevant to use cost-effectiveness as a criteria for aid evaluation.

Sustainability

A development activity, irrespective of whether it is financed by aid or not, becomes meaningful only when it leads to something that continues to exist and function after the activity itself has been completed.[63] This is the essence of the concept of sustainability. None of the evaluations really address the sustainability of the networks. Often because the respective TORs don't ask for it, but also because it is simply not seen as an issue. A research network cannot be sustainable. It is nothing but an externally financed research programme. A group of researchers organize themselves around a common research theme. What would happen if the donors withdrew their support seems to be clear to all evaluators: the networks would die. Furthermore, there are no other sources, and certainly not within Africa itself , that could compensate for such a shortfall in resources. Even if there were, it is doubtful whether they would be interested in funding the networks, since most of them operate more or less in isolation from national governments.

In other words, to justify supporting research networks of this kind in terms of sustainability, it is necessary to show that sustainable capacities are created. Sustainability usually requires functioning institutional frameworks in the researchers' home countries. Therefore, in itself the network is only important to

[63] Wai, D. ,"Bärkraften i kompetenshöjande projekt"in, Wohlgemuth, L. and Carlsson, J.: 1996 (note 20).

a limited extent. Sustainability is achieved when capacities created in the network contribute towards strengthening national institutions. None of the evaluations discuss this crucial question in a satisfactory way.

The impression gained from the evaluations is that the networks tend to become entities in their own rights, rather than just modes of transferring support to institutions for higher education and learning. For many researchers, the networks open possibilities to do research which defunct national institutions cannot offer. In not so few cases, the networks seem to be dominated by a small number of people who obviously have made the networks part of their career. For the aid agency, a network can be a very convenient way of bypassing weak and inefficient national institutions. In the short- to medium-term perspective, this is probably an attractive strategy for ensuring some degree of aid effectiveness. At the same time, however, it runs contrary to the general objectives of Sida, in which national institution building is emphasized.

9. "Filling the Gaps"—towards an evaluation approach

The main purpose of this report has been to identify issues that have not been sufficiently covered in the reviewed evaluations, and propose a model for an evaluation designed to answer these outstanding questions. The results from our meta-evaluation indicate shortcomings that must be considered critical, given the general objectives of Sida's support to research development, namely (*a*) to support national-based research capacity building, and (*b*) to support research with the purpose of producing results relevant for developing countries. Furthermore, Sida defines research capacity in terms of national capacities.[64] Thus, the ultimate justification of a research network is the extent to which it contributes towards building a nation's research capacity.

It is obvious that the evaluations still don't teach us to what extent important Sida objectives have been fulfilled by these research networks. There are particularly three aspects of a national research capacity building which remain unanswered. These are: (*a*) the capacity to plan and conduct important research; (*b*) the capacity to apply research results to local conditions; and (*c*) the capacity to establish and maintain attractive research milieus. These "grey" areas are also closely linked to Sida/UTV's evaluation criteria "impact" and "sustainability". We explore these issues a more below, before continuing with a discussion of a possible model for filling these gaps in our knowledge.

Given Sida's objectives and definition of research capacity, the purpose of supporting these networks should not only be linked to the relevance of the research area as such, such as the need to look into environmental problems in the coastal areas of Eastern Africa, or the need for alternative development strategies. In the final analysis, it must also be shown to what extent they contribute to strengthening and developing a nation's research capacity.

[64] See section 2.

None of the networks are able to continue their operations without external support; i.e., donor funds. They are creations of donors because they were seen as the most feasible instrument for transmitting support to research capacity building at the national level. This raises the question: why support something that cannot be sustained by Africa itself? Exploring this question may lead us to change slightly the way in which we understand sustainability. Perhaps the networks should not be seen as an institution building exercise. They are research projects, which have taken a regional form in order to be better able to economize on existing national resources. Research projects cannot per definition be sustainable—they come and go. But their results, in terms of training and research produced, should contribute to something with a lasting impact on the national level. Thus, the networks are nothing but an instrument for strengthening national researchers and institutions. What needs to be explored is the effectiveness of the networks in building national research capacity. For Sida, other instruments to achieve the same goal may be considered. Direct support to national universities is one example.

The issue of sustainability is not discussed in these evaluations. They don't spend much time on analysing the national capacities to make efficient use of the capacities created by the networks. Still, international experiences indicate that this is a key factor determining the effectiveness of capacity building. Furthermore, it is an issue that raises important questions regarding to Sida's future strategy for building research capacities. Before the conditions for sustainability have been researched further, it is difficult to justify research networks as an efficient instrument for capacity building.

It is not difficult to identify interesting and important research questions. To operationalize these into a method that can be practically useful is a different matter. As the last part of this paper, we explore a possible approach for evaluating the impact and sustainability of Sida's support to research networks in Africa.

In section 3 above we discuss concepts and definitions. We conclude that in order to understand fully what determines effective capacity building, it was important to apply a holistic perspective. Our analysis would be severely limited if we only considered individual capacity building. It is equally important to analyse existing institutional capacities to accommodate and make good use of the capacities that individuals possess. To conclude, the point of departure for designing the evaluation model is a two-pronged approach, where individual and institutional capacities are analysed in an integrated way. Figure 1 shows the logic involved in the model.

Let us look at the two sides of this model more closely and see what is required if capacity building is to be effective.

On one side we have the individual researcher who participates in the research network. This is a person with roots in a national research and training institution of some kind who has been invited to participate in the network on

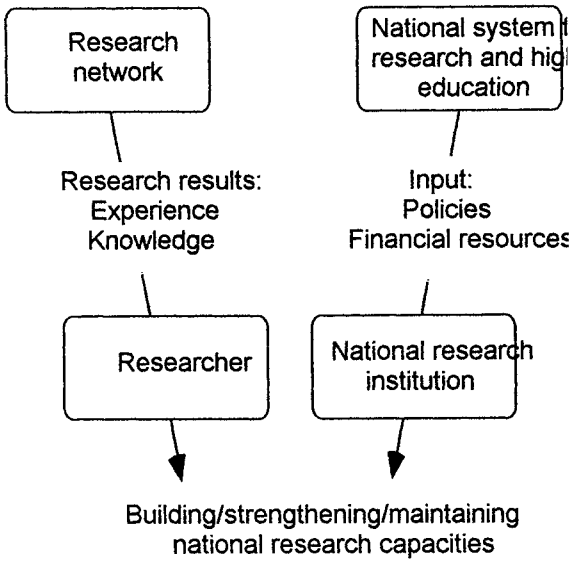

Figure 1. Causal flows in a model for evaluating the building of rese capacities

the basis of his research interests and qualifications. The possible rationales for the researcher to participate are many, and sometimes they are quite personal. But in general, one would assume that the network offered a possibility to deepen his research work through access to other researchers, books, articles, seminars, etc. Thus, the network offers a possibility for him to improve himself further as a researcher, that is, to build new capacities. Participation in the network does not mean that the researcher needs to leave his home institution. On the contrary, one would expect him to continue some of his duties: teaching, research and administration. The individual researcher thus becomes the vehicle for transmitting the benefits that the network offers back to his home institution. Through his teaching and research activities, he is expected to transmit new knowledge to students and fellow researchers at his institution and possibly elsewhere in the country.

On the other side we have the home institution of the individual researcher. It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of institutional capacity building cannot be the building of such capacities in the organization needed to run the network. Institutional strengthening must mean strengthening the home institutions of the researchers participating in the network. What determines the strength of the institution that is to be an important beneficiary of the network activities?

The effectiveness of an institution is determined by a wide range of factors. Among the factors internal to the institution, it is common to differentiate between the *resources* (staff, infrastructure, budgets) available to an

organization, and issues of *motivation* (incentives, reward and sanction).[65] The most common external factors stress the need for stable policy frameworks, providing clear "rules of the game", such as political stability and an economy capable of providing at least the minimum resource requirements of the various institutions in society.

Although the strength of the institution is primarily determined by factors outside the influence of the network, one can nevertheless identify some possible impacts emanating from the network. Few of the networks contain facilities for supplying equipment, library support, etc., to national institutions. Instead, any likely impact on national institutions must come through the activities of the individual researcher. One can assume that by transmitting new knowledge, skills and experience, other students and researchers, and hence the institution, will be strengthened. In terms of organizational strength—a cadre of good researchers and teachers, and reputable education programmes—an institution must be in a good position to attract external funds to supplement the meagre local resources it has available from the government. It is clear that this is a causal link that is not easy to evaluate. The link may not always be apparent. For example, it may be difficult to separate the impact of the network on an institution's capacity from that of other sources of influence.

So far we have outlined the principal flows and relations in the evaluation model. What does this mean in terms of practical research design? The study consists of four basic steps:

First, the objective of Sida's support is the building of national research capacities. Therefore, in order to achieve a high policy and strategy relevance, it is necessary for the study to focus on the country level. It is important that the individuals, active in a network, come from a country that is relevant from the point of Swedish aid policy in general and research collaboration in particular. This would facilitate a comparative analysis of alternative modes of supporting research—through established national research departments, or through network institutions largely created and maintained by donors. Although this is not the appropriate time to propose countries for inclusion in the study, a fair guess would be that candidates would be selected from eastern and southern Africa. Tentatively, 2–3 countries should be selected.

Second, once the countries have been selected, the networks to be included in the study need to be identified. Important criteria for selection are:

- Participants in the network (should include participants from the countries selected);
- Organization of the network (institutional or personal based?);
- Purpose of the network (capacity building, production of research results or both?);
- The network's disciplinary focus (archaeology, economics, etc.).

[65] Moore *et al.* (note 16), p. 21.

Third, our approach to evaluating individual capacity building has its roots in the traditions of the tracer study. The primary research object is the researcher. By tracing his work and activities over a longer time period—before he entered the network, during the time he was active in the network, and after his participation in the network has ended—this approach will shed some light on the type of capacity building resulting from the network. Below follows a sample of questions that should be asked:

- Where did he and does he spend his time? At his home institution or elsewhere?
- How has his academic production developed?
- Is he still working for a research-oriented institution?
- Has he been promoted?
- What does he do—teach, conduct research projects or take on consultancy assignments?
- Is he still pursuing his research interests?
- Are research students involved in his projects?

Fourth, investigating the issue of institutional capacity building requires an alternative approach. Capacity building requires strong institutions which can accommodate and even make use of output from the networks. At the same time, one could also expect that output from the network strengthens the institution. The question here is thus to what extent the national institutions possess the necessary strength. The tracer study needs to be complemented by an analysis of the situation of the researchers home institution. But it is equally important to situate the institution in a national and sectoral context. The institutional analysis can therefore conveniently be grouped into two analytical areas: the national and sectoral context of the institution, and the institution itself.

The analysis of the context of the institution should focus on aspects such as:

- The economic, social and political history of the country during the period 1985–1995, with particular emphasis on changes in development strategy and policies;
- Government policy for the sector, in the context of the national development policy;
- Government resources allocated to the sector;
- Other resources allocated to the sector;
- Competition within the sector—the existence of other institutions, public, semi-public or private—and its impact on the capacity and performance of the institution.

The situation experienced by the institution should be described in terms of:

- Objectives and mandate;
- Staffing situation in terms of numbers and qualification;
- Dependence of external resources;

- The budget: categories of revenues and expenditures in real terms;
- Resource requirements for maintaining a minimum operational level;
- Changes in the output of the institution;
- The impact of counterpart obligations on recurrent costs.

These four steps provide an empirical foundation for a final analysis. Although we do not present any detailed design variables, it is important to outline the direction, or major thrust, of the final assessment. It is useful to formulate some major questions in order to guide the analysis. This report has indicated that issues pertaining to "impact" and "sustainability" need to be addressed with greater care. A good starting point would thus be to address the following questions:

- To what extent have the research networks contributed to the building of national research capacities?
- To what extent has the national institutions managed to accommodate existing and new research capacities?
- Would the experiences gained from the evaluation suggest any changes in Sida's strategy for building national research capacities?

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Appendix

Terms of Reference for a study of evaluations of support to research capacity building in Africa through regional cooperation

Background

In the course of fiscal year 1995/96, Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV) is to complete an evaluation of Sida/SAREC's support to regional research cooperation in Africa. The evaluation is to assess the impact of existing forms of support on the development of research capacities in the countries concerned, and to provide a basis for the development of better and more efficient support models.

By regional research cooperation in Africa is intended research cooperation that includes researchers from several African countries. The term may also apply to research cooperation that includes researchers from other parts of the world, but only if the focus is on regional cooperation.

SAREC's project list for 1995 includes some 30-odd, ongoing efforts in support of regional research cooperation. Most are subsumed under the heading Regional Cooperation, others are listed under the headings Special Programmes and International Research. A large part of these efforts concerns social science research; the rest range between such disparate disciplines as marine biology, reproductive health and archaeology. A few are directly tied to SAREC's bilateral research support, but as a rule there are no such ties. The support is often targeted to a specific research organization that links researchers across national boundaries by setting up project-based research networks, organizing regionally oriented courses and conferences, and providing publication support and other services. Some of the organizations receiving SAREC support address researchers in all of Africa, other focus their activities on selected regions.

The conceptual basis for the planned evaluation is provided in SAREC's policy document, which identifies the development of research capacities as the main goal for Sida/SAREC's cooperation programmes with the poorest countries. The term "research capacity" is in the policy document defined as a nation's ability to:

- Independently identify and define research projects on important problems of development;
- Plan and conduct important research, or guide such research that cannot be carried out locally with national technical, financial or human resources alone;
- Evaluate, select and adapt research results for local application;
- Develop and maintain attractive and well functioning research environments, in order to - among other reasons - limit brain drain;
- Participate in and assimilate international research;
- Disseminate and apply research results;

- Prioritize research efforts on the basis of a rational assessment of available resources (research policy).

Regarding support to regional research cooperation, the policy document makes several important points. It stresses that programmes for regional research cooperation must be well rooted with researchers and research institutions on the national level, and that support to regional research cooperation should complement bilateral research support. It notes that a large part of SAREC's support to social science research is channelled through regional programmes, as such research is often not given priority in bilateral research cooperation programmes. It states that support to regional networks can play an important role where the preconditions for research on a national basis are lacking, and it points to the importance of regional programmes also to research training.

For UTV, the key question is how and with what effect SAREC has implemented these policy concepts and guidelines in its support to regional research cooperation in Africa. In what way and with what results has the development of research capacities been boosted? What is the positive and negative impact of regional research support on the development of research capacities at the national level? How do the regional programmes harmonize with the needs and priorities of national research institutions? Are the programmes well rooted in the research communities concerned? Are the results sustainable?

It is still too early to give more precise guidelines for the evaluation. Several of SAREC's efforts in support of regional research cooperation in Africa have been evaluated, in some cases more than once, but the evaluation results have never been compared and analysed. A first task for UTV is to commission such an analysis.

This prestudy should also propose a model for further evaluation of the impact of regional efforts on capacity building. The various components of the very broad concept of "capacity building" must be analysed and operationalized, and the guidelines for support to regional research cooperation must be examined. A question for discussion is if the policy document provides sufficient guidance for evaluation.

The purpose of the prestudy

The purpose of the prestudy is to provide a basis for UTV's planned evaluation of SAREC's support to the development of research capacity in Africa through regional research cooperation. It should summarize the results of previous evaluations and identify issues requiring further study. It should conclude with a model for further evaluation of SAREC's support to the development of research capacity through regional research cooperation. The model should be based on a careful analysis of the concept of "capacity building".

The scope of the prestudy

The assignment has three components:

1. The prestudy is to summarize SAREC's experience in supporting the development of research capacity in Africa through regional research cooperation, as described in evaluation reports and other documents.
2. The study is to include a methodologically oriented meta-evaluation of the evaluations under review.

3. Using evaluation reports and other reference documents, the study is to develop a model for evaluating support to the development of research capacities through regional research support programmes in Africa. The model should build on an analysis of SAREC's definition of the concept "research capacity" and of the guidelines for support to regional research cooperation given in SAREC's policy document.

Summary of experiences

1. The following efforts and programmes are to be covered by the evaluation:

1. AERC
2. AFREPREN
3. The archaeology programme Urban Origins
4. CGIAR (ILCA, ILRAD, WARDA)
5. CODESRIA
6. SAPES
7. The regionally oriented components of SAREC's women's programme 8. Sida/SAREC's regional programme for marine research
9. Third World Forum

The selection reflects the availability of evaluations. Other selection criteria have not been applied.

2. The evaluations under review should, to the extent possible, be presented in terms of established categories for evaluation of development cooperation:

Relevance: Can the efforts be justified in terms of regional research needs and of Sida's and the recipient countries' priorities in the particular areas of research?

Goal fulfilment: Have established programme goals been met? Can goal fulfilment at various levels be measured in a satisfactory way? How is goal fulfilment assessed in the evaluations under review?

The discussion of goal fulfilment should dovetail with SAREC's definition of the concept of "capacity building". Attention should also be given to how this concept is defined and operationalized in the documents under study. Are the evaluators' conceptualizations in keeping with the definition in SAREC's policy document?

Effects: What has been the impact of the support? Have there been any unforeseen side effects - positive or negative - of SAREC-supported activities?

The study should test whether the evaluated efforts comply with the principle, expressed in SAREC's policy document, that regional research programmes complement bilateral research cooperation. Careful attention should be given to discussions of positive and/or negative impact on university systems and on academic research in the regions concerned. Cost-effectiveness: Is the input reasonably proportionate to the outcome? Do the evaluations discuss issues of cost-effectiveness? Do they question whether there are more cost-effective ways of achieving the stated goals? What answers do they give?

Sustainability: Is sustainability discussed? What is the assessment of the sustainability of the efforts under evaluation? On what is this assessment based? Do some types of regional research cooperation yield more sustainable results than others?

An important question regards the sustainability of support to research NGOs. The issue concerns both the viability of such NGOs and the direct and indirect effects of their activities. What is the probability that NGOs and NGO-networks receiving Sida support will survive without donor support? Is there reason to believe that the activities of these organizations will have long-term effects on capacity building in the countries and regions concerned?

3. Wherever possible, programme comparisons should be considered. What conclusions may be drawn about conditions that may determine success or failure? Is it possible to identify factors that should be reviewed on a regular basis in connection with regionally oriented support to the development of research capacities? To what extent can results be explained in terms of the forms taken for research cooperation? What are the contextual preconditions for success? What importance should be given to how the relationship between donor and recipient develops? What special demands does regionally oriented research support place on donor organizations?

To the extent possible, the conclusions should refer to the international discussion of regional research support. How do SAREC's experiences compare with those of other donors?

Methodologically oriented meta-evaluation

1. The following efforts and programmes are to be covered by the meta-evaluation:

1. AERC
2. AFREPREN
3. The archaeology programme Urban Origins
4. CGIAR (ILCA, ILRAD, WARDA)
5. CODESRIA
6. SAPES

7. The regionally oriented components of SAREC's women's programme 8. Sida/SAREC's regional programme for marine research
9. Third World Forum

2. The meta-evaluation is to have a methodological orientation. Have investigations been conducted professionally and with due care? Have relevant methods for data gathering and analysis been used? Can the results be considered reliable? The assessment should reflect the guidelines for evaluations given in Sida's evaluation policy and in SASDA's template for analysing evaluations.

3. An assessment should also be made regarding the extent to which the reviewed evaluation reports meet the requirements expressed in the respective ToRs. Does each satisfactorily answer the questions phrased in the ToR, or are there significant discrepancies between the ToR and the report?

Model for further evaluation

With these results of in hand, the evaluator is tasked with identifying problem areas requiring further evaluation, and with proposing suitable evaluation methods. Methodological issues, concerning the measurement and assessment of impact on capacity building, should also be addressed.

The assignment also includes identifying efforts that merit further investigation in a future evaluation. The selection criteria should be stated clearly. The selection should be made from the catalogue, included below, listing current SAREC regional efforts and providing supplementary data on completed efforts.

The proposal shall be developed from an analysis of SAREC's definition of the concept of "capacity building", and from the guidelines for support to regional research cooperation, given in SAREC's policy document. It should also tie in with international discussions of capacity building through development cooperation.

Reference base

The reference base for the study consist of the documents in the annexed list, plus other documents that may be added, by agreement, in the course of the work. At the consultant's request, UTV agrees to retrieve relevant documents from Sida's archives. The consultant provides such supplementary material of theoretical or methodological nature as is needed.

Time plan and implementation

The assignment is to be carried out in dialogue with UTV and is to be completed in the course of 4 working weeks. A final report is to be delivered to UTV no later than 15 August 1996.

Sida Evaluations - 1995/96

95/1 Educação Ambiental em Moçambique. Kajsa Pehrsson
Department for Democracy and Social Development

95/2 Agitators, Incubators, Advisers - What Roles for the EPUs? Joel Samoff
Department for Research Cooperation

95/3 Swedish African Museum Programme (SAMP). Leo Kenny, Beata Kasale
Department for Democracy and Social Development

95/4 Evaluation of the Establishing of the Bank of Namibia 1990-1995. Jon A. Solheim, Peter Winai
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/1 The Beira-Gothenburg Twinning Programme. Arne Heileman, Lennart Peck
The report is also available in Portuguese
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/2 Debt Management. (Kenya) Kari Nars
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/3 Telecommunications - A Swedish Contribution to Development. Lars Rylander, Ulf Rundin et al
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

96/4 Biotechnology Project: Applied Biocatalysis. Karl Schügerl
Department for Research Cooperation

96/5 Democratic Development and Human Rights in Ethiopia. Christian Åhlund
Department for East and West Africa

96/6 Estruturação do Sistema Nacional de Gestão de Recursos Humanos. Júlio Nabais, Eva-Marie Skogsberg, Louise Helling
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/7 Avaliação do Apoio Sueco ao Sector da Educação na Guiné Bissau 1992-1996. Marcella Ballara, Sinesio Bacchetto, Ahmed Dawelbeit, Julieta M Barbosa, Börje Wallberg
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/8 Konvertering av rysk militärindustri. Maria Lindqvist, Göran Reitberger, Börje Svensson
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/9 Building Research Capacity in Ethiopia. E W Thulstrup, M Fekadu, A Negewo
Department for Research Cooperation

96/10 Rural village water supply programme - Botswana. Jan Valdelin, David Browne, Elsie Alexander, Kristina Boman, Marie Grönvall, Imelda Molokomme, Gunnar Settergren
Department for Natural Resources and the Environment

96/11 UNICEF's programme for water and sanitation in central America - Facing new challenges and opportunities. Jan Valdelin, Charlotta Adelstål, Ron Sawyer, Rosa Núnes, Xiomara del Torres, Daniel Gubler
Department for Natural Resources and the Environment

96/12 Cooperative Environment Programme - Asian Institute of Technology/Sida, 1993-1996. Thomas Malmqvist, Börje Wallberg
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/13 Forest Sector Development Programme - Lithuania-Sweden. Mårten Bendz
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/14 Twinning Progammes With Local Authorities in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Håkan Falk, Börje Wallberg
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/15 Swedish Support to the Forestry Sector in Latvia. Kurt Boström
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/16 Swedish Support to Botswana Railways. Brian Green, Peter Law
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

96/17 Cooperation between the Swedish County Administration Boards and the Baltic Countries. Lennart C G Almqvist
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/18 Swedish - Malaysian Research Cooperation on Tropical Rain Forest Management. T C Whitmore
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC

96/19 Sida/SAREC Supported Collaborative Programme for Biomedical Research Training in Central America. Alberto Nieto
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC

96/20 The Swedish Fisheries Programme in Guinea Bissau, 1977-1995. Tom Alberts, Christer Alexanderson
Department for Natural Resources and the Environment

96/21 The Electricity Sector in Mozambique, Support to the Sector By Norway and Sweden. Bo Andreasson, Steinar Grongstad, Vidkunn Hveding, Ralph Kårhammar
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

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Department for Natural Resources and the Environment

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Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

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Department for Central and Eastern Europe

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Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/32 Support to the Road Sector in Latvia. Anders Markstedt
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/33 Support to the Road Sector in Lithuania. Anders Markstedt
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/34 Support to the Maritime Sector in Latvia. Nils Bruzelius
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/35 Sida/SAREC's Marine Science Programs. Jan Rudengren, Per Brinck, Brian Davy
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC

96/36 Support to the Development of Civil Aviation Administration in the Baltic States. Johan Svenningsson
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/37 The Opening of the two Road Sectors in Angola. C H Eriksson, G Möller
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

96/38 Statistikproduktion i Nordvästra Ryssland. Lennart Grenstedt. Also available in Russia
Department for Central and Eastern Europe

96/39 Sri Lankan - Swedish Research Cooperation. Nimal Sanderatne, Jan S. Nilsson
Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC

96/40 Curriculum Development in Ethiopia, A Consultancy Study for the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia and for Sida. Mikael Palme, Wiggo Kilborn, Christopher Stroud, Oleg Popov
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/41 Sida Support to Environmental Public Awareness and Training Projects through The Panos Institute, Gemini News Service and Television Trust for the Environment. Leo Kenny, Alice Petren
Department for Democracy and Social Development

96/42 Concessionary Credits in Support of Economic Development in Zimbabwe. Karlis Goppers
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

96/43 Botswana Road Safety Improvement Projects. Rob Davey
Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation

96/44 Programa de Estudo Pos Draduacao - PEP Guinea Bissau 1992-1996. Roy Carr Hill, Ahmed Dawalbeit
Department for Democracy and Social Development

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Biståndsforum, Sida
S-105 25 Stockholm
Phone: (+46) 8 698 5722
Fax: (+46) 8 698 5638

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY
S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Fax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
Telegram: sida stockholm. Postgiro: 1 56 34–9
E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: http://www.sida.se