

Managing the NGO Partnership

**An assessment of stakeholder responses to
an evaluation of development assistance
through Swedish NGOs**

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Foreword

This study has been carried out by a team comprising Claes Lindahl, team leader, Elin Björkman, who together with Claes Lindahl undertook the interviews in Sweden and analysed the NGOs policy documents, Petra Stark who was responsible for the administration and processing of the mail survey, Sundeep Waslekar who undertook the Indian field work, and Kjell Öström who undertook the fieldwork in Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

The study was conducted during August to October 1998. It involved numerous interviews with government personnel, Swedish and non-Swedish NGOs. We thank them all for their positive and generous contributions. It has also included a questionnaire addressed to a sample of the Swedish NGOs. We are very grateful for the co-operation of those who responded to this questionnaire, which was carried out over a short period. In the field, the partner NGOs' and the Swedish NGOs' field offices provided valuable support and took the time to respond to all our questions. We believe that the information gathered for this report was of sufficient breadth to reach some broad conclusions. However, we are aware that the Swedish NGO system is vast and diverse, and that to capture this heterogeneity is impossible in a study of a few months' duration.

In November 1998, a draft report was circulated for comments to all NGOs which had contributed to the study, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida and two of the authors of the Proxy report (Roger Riddell and Lennart Peck). Written comments on the report were submitted to us by four NGOs, the Proxy evaluation's authors, Sida-SEKA responsible for the NGO support, Sida-UTV which commissioned the study, and the Swedish Embassy in Tanzania. The NGOs were also invited to a seminar for discussion of the report which was held January 13, 1999 at Sida. This half-day seminar was attended by 25 persons from the NGOs and Sida. The written comments to the draft report, our response to these and the discussions at the seminar are presented in a separate report in Swedish, *Diskussionen kring rapporten Managing the NGO partnership*.¹

The comments to the draft report were taken into account in preparation of a second draft report. In general, the comments from the NGOs were positive of the study, and included suggestions how the results could be used to enhance the effectiveness of the NGO support, and also how the study could be used for a continuous dialogue between Sida and the NGOs. The authors of the report, notably Roger Riddell, provided valuable critique of the methodology applied, and pointed especially at the reservations for generalisations ODI's report contained. Sida, UTV, which had commissioned the report, provided a considerable critique, arguing that the draft report had not fulfilled its Terms of Reference. In the 'comment report', we have responded to this critique. A second draft, together with MPI's comments to the comments were submitted to Sida-UTV in February. Sida-UTV had further comments on the second draft report, which have been taken into account in the preparation of the final report.

Stockholm, July, 1999

Claes Lindahl

¹ This report is in Swedish due to the fact the seminar was held in Swedish, and some of the comments to the report were prepared in Swedish.

Executive summary

Background

This report concerns the impact of an evaluation of the Swedish official NGO support which was undertaken by Sida in 1994. This evaluation, often named the 'Proxy evaluation', was carried out by a British-Swedish team. It is one of Sida's most ambitious undertakings in respect of evaluations, covering some 40 NGO projects in four different countries, and with a cost of SEK 3 million.

The Swedish support through the NGOs is vast and diverse with several thousand projects implemented by hundreds of different NGOs in over 100 countries with a total annual budget of SEK 800 – 900 million. For administrative reasons, Sida has signed frame-agreements with thirteen of the largest NGOs. Some of these function as intermediaries between Sida and the NGO community as 'umbrella NGOs'. The management of the Swedish official support through Swedish non-governmental organisations is a balancing act between, on the one hand, the legitimate role of Sida to assure that the NGO support is used effectively and efficiently in line with the overall objectives of Swedish development assistance, and, on the other hand, respect for the autonomy of the NGOs to carry out their own projects and programmes in line with the Parliament's mandate. The Proxy evaluation took place in this context: it was a unique effort by Sida to assess comprehensively the field operations of the NGO support, partly with the objective of providing feedback on this type of aid, partly to support the on-going capacity development amongst the NGOs towards enhanced effectiveness. For this purpose, the evaluation was carried out with an unusual degree of consultation with the NGOs at all stages of the evaluation, from its design to the dissemination of the results.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study, according to the Terms of Reference, is to promote the learning process towards improved accountability, effectiveness and impact of Swedish NGO development assistance funded by Sida. The focus of the study is to assess the impact of the Proxy evaluation on different stakeholders in the NGO system: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida, the Swedish NGOs and their local counterparts, and to determine the reasons for impact on these stakeholders.

The study, carried out during the period August – October 1998, builds on an extensive mail survey of a sample of fifty Swedish NGOs, personal interviews with a broad range of Swedish NGOs and officials in government and Sida, a review of policy documents by selected NGOs and field studies in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The methodological problems of a study of this nature are considerable, including the problems of tracing impact of a study almost 4 years after it was published, difficulties in isolating the impact of the Proxy evaluation from other influences impacting on the NGO system; problems in assessing organisational perceptions and behaviour (rather than individual), and problems related to generalising about as diverse a community as the Swedish NGOs. This must be born in mind reading the study.

Findings

Awareness. The study found that within the framework NGOs there is clear awareness of the Proxy evaluation. Its findings have been used actively in the internal discussions in many of these organisations. The attitude towards the Proxy evaluation is generally positive within this group and the study perceived as useful. The study has mainly been used as an input into a broader debate within the NGO community which was on-going when the study took place. This debate concerns issues

such as sustainability, application of management tools such as appraisal, LFA, etc. Furthermore, the value of the Proxy evaluation was related to the process of consultations and dissemination of results which surrounded it. This process triggered discussions between NGOs and also between Sida and the NGOs. Such discussions had a value in itself. Stakeholders were actively consulted in the process of preparation of the study and drafting the Terms of Reference, and also in the process of disseminating the results in various seminars. This process allowed a certain ownership of the evaluation by the framework NGOs, reduced the risk that Sida would be perceived as intruding in the domain of these NGOs.

Amongst the non-framework NGOs, i.e. NGOs with which Sida has not signed framework agreements and which constitute the vast majority of NGOs, the degree of awareness of the Proxy evaluation is much less, the internal discussion of its findings has been limited, and the attitudes towards the study are less positive. The survey indicates that a majority of the non-framework NGOs have never heard of the Proxy evaluation. They, except those directly involved in the case studies, were excluded by design from the consultative approach. Furthermore, the study found that only a small share of the umbrella NGOs appear to have used the findings of the Proxy evaluation in the interaction with 'their NGOs'. While direct dissemination of a study is not the only means of creating influence, these findings, nevertheless, raise the question of how well Sida's management delegation to the umbrella NGOs functions.

Impact. In terms of impact, the survey conducted by the study indicates that except for a few NGOs, the Proxy evaluation is not perceived to have had any impact what so ever. Thus, only about half a dozen of the framework NGOs claim that the Proxy evaluation has had an influence on them. On the other hand, they constitute a group accounting for a large share of the overall Sida budget for NGO support. Furthermore, they have pivotal roles in the decentralised management system as they have a normative role for other NGOs. Hence, a change process in some of these NGOs is likely to eventually influence a larger number of NGOs. It should also be added that assumed impact is not the same thing as real impact. It is not possible to judge to what extent there has been an impact in spite of statements to the contrary by the NGOs.

The impact of the Proxy evaluation is mostly conceptual at the framework NGO level. The evaluation contributed to a general discussion on development issues, confirmed already on-going debates, contributed to the overall strategic thinking amongst the NGOs, etc. As such, the study might indirectly have contributed to a change in policies which guide organisational behaviour. However, it is difficult to trace impact to specific actions, partly as such actions are subject to many sources of influence, partly as the Proxy evaluation, in line with its directives, did not contain any specific recommendations to the NGOs.

According to sources in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sida, the impact of the Proxy Evaluation on the government's management of the NGO support has been considerable. Thus, the study is said to have shed new light on the NGO support, and provided facts and knowledge in an area earlier largely based on beliefs. The Ministry has changed its instructions to Sida concerning the NGO support towards greater goal-orientation, i.e. a *normative action* for building civil society with potentially considerable impact on the whole NGO system. Sida claims the Proxy evaluation was instrumental in the change of the relationship between the NGOs and Sida, and that it contributed to lay the foundation for more open co-operation. The Proxy evaluation triggered joint work between Sida and the framework NGOs to formulate new Sida guidelines for NGO support, even if the specific recommendations by the evaluation as such had limited impact.

In terms of *non-normative* recommendations by the Proxy evaluation to Sida – for example, supporting the capacity of the NGOs to undertake impact assessments; and enhance the exchange of information between Sida and the NGOs, less seems to have been implemented so far, and the issues are still perceived as problems.

To judge from field studies in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, the framework NGOs have used the Proxy evaluation to a certain extent in their discussions with local partner organisations. The impact of such discussions are hard to trace and to isolate from other influences. Local NGOs are subject to a large number of influences from various donors and the concept of the Swedish NGO as a pro-active player is often incorrect. Many so called Swedish NGO projects are in fact multi donor funded initiatives by the local NGOs.

Validity and reliability. The current study has made an effort to assess the relevance and validity of the Proxy evaluation. The study found that - from a methodological point of view - the Proxy evaluation displayed major shortcomings, both in how the study was conducted and how the results were used (by Sida). First, the developmental criteria the Proxy evaluation used to judge the NGO performance are not coherent with official Swedish aid objectives, hence the yardstick used can be questioned. Second, the Proxy evaluation's ToR focus strongly on cost-effectiveness, which the authors chose largely to omit in their discussion. As a result, not more is known of the cost-effectiveness of the Swedish NGO support after the study than prior to it. Third, the Proxy evaluation missed the underlying concept behind the Swedish NGO support as assistance to the popular movements' own activities, and rather applied an Anglo-Saxon idea of NGOs as instruments for implementation of the government's projects. This makes also the yardstick for measurement of questionable validity. Fourth, the Proxy evaluation made a strong case against generalisation to the whole NGO system from the studied 37 cases as these were not representative for the whole NGO community. Yet, its results have been used by Sida for generalisations, and the study has been treated as an authoritative source of the Swedish NGOs' effectiveness, or lack thereof. These shortcomings raise some key questions in respect of Sida's use of the evaluation tool. These problems were not discussed at the time of the Proxy evaluation, nor made a feature of the ToR for the current study.

Determinants of impact. The study has identified four key determinants of impact, two positive, and two negative of the Proxy evaluation. On the positive side, the extensive consultation and dissemination process with all framework NGOs has clearly contributed to the awareness of the study amongst these, and their use of the study as an input into the on-going policy and strategy formulation. Furthermore, this process had a value in itself, as it triggered cross-organisational dialogue and learning. The high status team with Roger Riddell, ODI, as team leader also contributed giving the evaluation a high profile in Sida and the NGOs, which is likely to have contributed to both awareness and impact. On the negative side, the questionable validity and reliability of the Proxy evaluation was a factor reducing impact as many NGOs which had read the report, didn't recognise themselves in the study, hence found the conclusions of little relevance as a stimuli for change. There seems to have been an inverse relationship of such impact in the sense that the stakeholders closest to the reality on the ground, were the least affected. Lastly, the functioning of the management system with frame and non-frame NGOs seems to have hampered a deeper discussion of the study beyond the framework NGOs. At least in this case, the system has not functioned as an effective means of disseminating know how and learning.

Cost-effectiveness. The Proxy evaluation was one of Sida's most expensive evaluations so far. An assessment of the cost-effectiveness of such an investment is difficult as the potential direct benefits are in the form of enhanced knowledge, changed perceptions, influence on policy, etc.

However, the annual volume of the NGO support – estimated to be above SEK 1 billion when the NGOs' own contributions are included – implies that even a very marginal positive effect on the quality of such support would make the study pay off. Given the rarity of assessments of this nature, and the extensive discussion the Proxy evaluation triggered, it appears to have been a worthwhile investment. However, the cost-effectiveness could have been much enhanced had the chosen methodology allowed more generalised and relevant findings. It could also have been enhanced by a dissemination process aiming at a larger number of stakeholders.

The process of evaluation. The Terms of Reference for an evaluation is the most important steering document and also the basis for the legal contract between the client and the evaluators. It is essential that such documents are logical and precise, and not contradictory in their content. In the Proxy evaluation the T.o.R contained specifications in terms of methodology which contradicted the overall objectives of the evaluation in terms of allowing generalisations. Thus, the responsibility for choice of method was wrongly made by Sida, not by the professional evaluators.

The most essential aspect of an evaluation is its reliability and validity. If unreliable and invalid findings lead to implementation of explicit or implicit recommendations, the chance of counterproductive results is considerable. To judge from the Proxy evaluation, Sida paid limited attention to assessment of reliability and validity of the evaluation.

Recommendations

1. Sida's decentralised management system of the NGO support to the framework NGOs needs to be reviewed, especially in terms of how and to what extent methodological development, lessons learned, etc. trickle down to the majority of Swedish NGOs.
2. The (cost)-effectiveness of the official development assistance Swedish NGOs are still to a large extent unknown. It is essential that Sida undertakes a new evaluation of this support, more based on the unique features of the Swedish NGOs and on their own merits. Cost-effectiveness should be a key criteria in such an evaluation.
3. Based on the survey in this study, there is a considerable demand for technical support and a dialogue on policy issues with Sida from both framework and non-framework NGOs. Sida could do more to meet this demand.
4. Sida needs to improve on its process of writing T.o.R for evaluations in the sense of focus on the objectives and the essential questions, while leaving the methodology to be determined by the evaluators.
5. Sida needs to strengthen its capacity to assess validity and reliability of evaluations. A solid foundation of an evaluation should be a pre-requisite before recommendations are put in motion, especially if the latter are normative. Sida must avoid the temptations of using hypotheses as final truths and spend more time in testing hypotheses.

Lessons learned

The Proxy evaluation was a step in a long-term process of increasing the organisational co-operation between the NGOs and Sida. This process started with considerable reluctance of interfering in the NGOs' autonomy from both sides. Over time – and the Proxy evaluation was a significant step in this – the relationship has become much more based on dialogue with an apparent demand from the NGOs of a stronger interaction with Sida. There seems to be an opportunity for enhanced *cross-organisational* learning between Sida and the NGOs. Thus, the NGOs have certain skills and expe-

riences that would benefit the bilateral co-operation, especially as the latter is increasingly oriented towards projects and programmes outside the public sector, more decentralised and more focused on issues of governance and civil society. The NGOs, on the other hand, might learn or benefit from stronger Sida co-operation in terms of *replicability* of projects, scaling up *innovations*, influencing government policy, linking projects to sector programmes, etc.

The Proxy evaluation indicates that the process of evaluation is (at least) as important as the evaluation itself. The process – in the meaning of consultations prior to the evaluation study, participation in drafting the terms of reference, the interaction during the evaluation per se, and the dissemination of the results – contributes to awareness of and interest in the study, including ownership. It should also reduce the chance of mis-representations and mis-understandings. A consultative and participatory process of an evaluation, and especially wide dissemination of the results, has an added value of stimulating discussions between the stakeholders and between the stakeholders and Sida. In such interaction the evaluation might function as a catalyst even if the specific findings and recommendations are not fully shared. Evaluations can provide a forum for such broad interaction which otherwise rarely or never takes place. The participative and consultative element of evaluations is essential in order to create a condition for change and impact. If Sida undertake similar assessments of evaluations, they should preferably be initiated more or less simultaneously with the evaluation itself. Only then can a reliable baseline be established to measure changes against. Tracing effects and impact would also be simplified by direct interaction with the key participants. If the evaluation of the evaluation is permitted to be continued for a period of time, it would allow reliable monitoring of changes in operations, policies and to some extent also attitudes.

Acronyms

AMREF	African Medical and Research Foundation
BIFO	Föreningen Bistånd och Information genom Frivilliga Organisationer
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCO	Development Co-operation Office
EFS	Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen
EU	European Union
ICS	Interconsult, Sweden
LFA	Logical Framework Analysis
LO	Landsorganisationen
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PACS	Pan Asia Co-operation Society
PMU	Pingstmissionens U-landshjälp
SAK	Svenska Afghanistankommittén
SCC	Swedish Co-operative Centre
SEK	Swedish Krona
SEKA	Sida's NGO Division
SEO	Svenska Enskilda Organisationer
SFRV	Svenska Kyrkans Stiftelse för Rikskyrklig Verksamhet
SHIA	Svenska Handikappsorganisationers Internationella Biståndsförening
Sida	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
SKM	Svenska Kyrkans Mission
SVS	Svensk VolontärSamverkan
TCO	Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation
T.o.R.	Terms of Reference
UBV	Utbildning för Biståndsverksamhet
UTV	Sida Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This study deals with two issues in development assistance: 1) the use of evaluations as a tool for learning and managing change and 2) the management of official government development assistance through non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The basis for the study is an assessment of the impact of an evaluation concerning Government support to Swedish NGOs commissioned by Sida in 1994. The study, carried out by a joint Swedish-British team under the leadership of Roger Riddell of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) was an unusual event in Sida from several perspectives². First, it was one of Sida's most ambitious evaluations with a budget for the study alone in the order of SEK 3 million, involving a nine-person team and empirical case studies in four countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Second, the evaluation was carried out with an unusually high degree of involvement by the stakeholders prior, during and after the evaluation. Third, the evaluation was unique in the sense that it attempted to take a comprehensive view of the effectiveness and efficiency of the official NGO support.

The Proxy evaluation took place at a time of considerable rethinking of aid internationally. It was commissioned a few years after the end of the Cold War at a time when the global economic system was being remodelled. Not only did the post-Cold War era change aid in the sense of its political fundamentals, but the early 1990s also saw a rethinking in aid of the role of government versus civil society and the market. In addition, there was an on-going change process in the perception of the NGOs in Sweden. They had enjoyed a considerable degree of good-will in the 1980s, partly as a result of disappointing results in government to government aid, partly due to the configuration of the Swedish political scene. As a result, the budget for NGO support had increased rapidly until the first years of the 1990s, some years exceeding even what Sida had requested in its budget proposition. However, questions were increasingly being asked as to whether the NGOs were as effective as was assumed.

The evaluation of the development impact by Swedish NGOs was not an isolated event. Similar reviews had been carried out, or were on-going elsewhere, such as those in Finland and Norway. Thus the Proxy evaluation should be seen in a broader context of rethinking aid in general, and aid through NGOs specifically. This process is on-going, in Sweden as elsewhere (e.g. the EU and the OECD). An example of the latter is the OECD study by Roger Riddell: *Searching for Impact and Methods: NGO evaluation Synthesis Report*.³

1.2 The objectives of the study

The terms of reference for the current study state as the purpose *to promote the learning process toward improved accountability, effectiveness and impact of the Swedish NGO development assistance funded by Sida. To this end, the study shall distinguish between three areas of learning: development processes and programming, evaluation methodology, and the performance of the relevant Swedish NGOs and Sida. The study is meant to be used to initiate or further guide discussions within and between NGOs and Sida in these areas, and in the process enhance communication, common understanding and learning.*

² Riddell, R., Bebbington, A. & Peck, L.: *Promoting Development by Proxy. An Evaluation of the Development Impact of Government Support to Swedish NGOs*, Sida Evaluation Report, 1995/2.

³ DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, OECD, 1997:2.

With this objective in mind, the current study has gone to some length in determining what the Proxy evaluation concluded in terms of development processes and programming, evaluation methodology and performance, how those conclusions have been perceived by the NGOs, to what extent they consider a change having taken place in these areas since the Proxy evaluation, and finally, to what extent they consider such changes due to the Proxy evaluation. The bulk of that discussion is included in chapter 4.

The terms of reference outline Scope of the Study by defining a series of questions concerning the effects and impact on, and the lessons learned by the NGOs, Sida and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Proxy evaluation. The T.o.R. also want to know the determinants for such effects and impact as a means to assess the Proxy evaluation as a tool for learning and change. Amongst these potential determinants are the planning process behind the evaluation, to what extent the evaluation sufficiently took into account the diversity of the NGOs, the dissemination process, clarity and accessibility of the report, perceived accuracy of findings and conclusions, etc.

The specific questions raised by the T.o.R. are summarised below. The detailed T.o.R. for the study are given in Annex 1.

Table 1: Summary of the questions asked by the Terms of Reference for the study

1. What are the effects of the Proxy on discussions, awareness and perceptions in the Swedish NGOs on their development work, strategies and modes of operation, judged against the influence of other sources?
2. To what extent and in which way has the Proxy evaluation led to changes in policies, strategies, activities and methodologies of the Swedish NGOs in their development assistance funded by Sida's NGO Division, judged against the background of other sources of influence?
3. Do the NGOs see evaluation as an exercise in its own right, or place it within a project cycle framework?
4. What is the impact of the Proxy evaluation on Sida's policies for handling support to the NGOs relative to other sources of influence?
5. Has the Proxy impacted on policy and fund allocation to NGOs by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?
6a. What are the lessons of the Proxy evaluation as an instrument or tool for learning and change for Swedish NGOs and for Sida?
b. What are the lessons for future undertakings of similar evaluations?
7. Was the evaluation planned and conducted with sufficient attention to the varying conditions of the NGOs?
8. Lessons learned and not learned the last few years in the NGO community from the Proxy in approaches, policies and methodologies?
9. To what extent have the Swedish NGOs raised issues discussed in the Proxy evaluations with partners in the field?
10. To what extent has discussions under 9 above meant raising standards of performance?
11. To what extent do Swedish NGOs perceive they know more about impact of their interventions now than 3 years ago?
12. Has the Proxy evaluation lead to a greater communication across and between the Swedish NGOs?
13. To what extent has the four country studies of the Proxy been disseminated, studied, discussed and made use of within the Swedish NGOs and in their partners?
14. What are the factors and circumstances that have determined impact of the Proxy evaluation? For example: a. dissemination b. clarity and accessibility of report c. perceived accuracy of findings and conclusions d. credibility of the study team e. specificity and feasibility of recommendations f. timeliness g. relevance to stakeholders' aim and interests h. participation by stakeholders in earlier stages of the process
15. To what extent is there an impact of the Proxy evaluation beyond the central headquarters level?

As shown above, the T.o.R for the study focus on studying the impact of the Proxy evaluation, while they are near silent on the issue of reliability and validity, i.e. whether the evaluation was accurate in its findings. Hence the T.o.R do not ask the question whether, and to what degree, it was **desirable** that the Proxy evaluations findings and recommendations **should** impact on the NGO system. The importance of this aspect is reinforced by the fact that a) the evaluators themselves saw their findings as based on a non-representative sample of NGO projects and thus as preliminary and subject for validation for the NGO support at large; and b) the leader of the Swedish firm that participated in the Proxy evaluation questioned the methodology used by the study and the validity of the findings. (See further below).

1.3 A preparatory study by Sida

As a preamble to the current study, Sida undertook a preparatory study in the autumn of 1997. This study included an assessment of the study itself, its process, Sida's response to the findings and also an inquiry with the 13 Frame-NGOs. The result was presented in a paper dated March 1998 which forms a background to this study⁴. Based on a response from about half of the NGOs, this paper provisionally indicated that the Proxy evaluation appeared to *have had a significant impact, relative to other sources of influence ... on most of those concerned*.

The responses from the NGOs indicated that the Proxy evaluation had:

- influenced the discussions and work orientation and methods in the NGOs by providing a common terminology and frame of reference, and also an external perspective of the work of the NGOs;
- helped NGOs to better understand or identify weaknesses as well as strengths in their efforts;
- triggered greater interaction between the NGOs and enhanced learning in the NGO community;
- put strategic thinking and sustainability higher on the agenda, and triggered a greater demand for LEA techniques;
- improved the relationship with Sida, and clarified the roles of Sida versus NGOs;
- triggered development of new Sida Guidelines for NGO funding;
- made Sida improve the exchange of information between Sida and the Swedish NGOs through more frequent contacts;
- been well received by all concerned and had provided a constructive and useful background for further development and improvement of Swedish NGO development assistance.

Hence, the study appeared to have made quite an impact. However, the preparatory study made it clear that its findings were based on a limited sample, and that such hypotheses had to be tested by the larger study.

1.4 Methodology – the conceptual framework

The current Study has addressed the task by assessing the Proxy evaluation at three different levels:

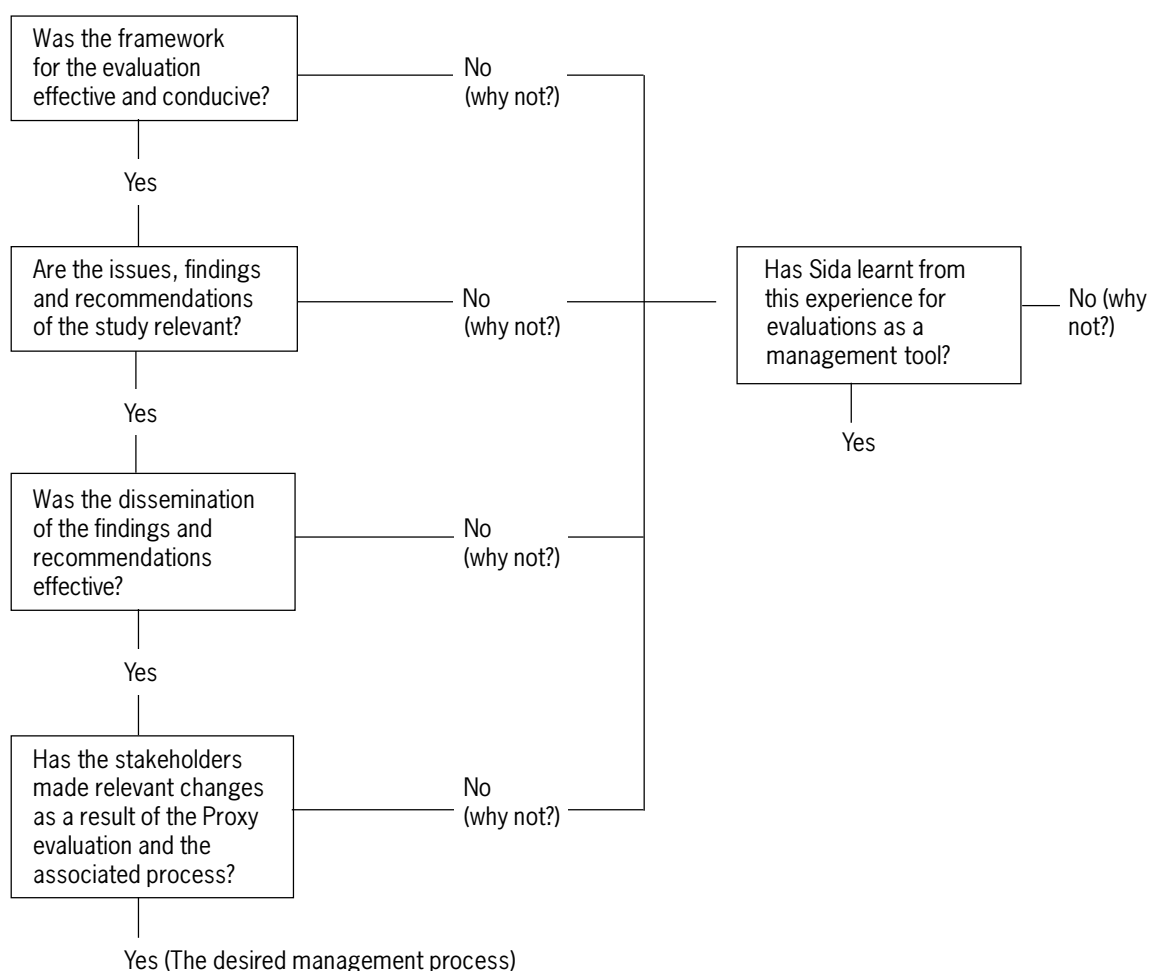
1. The Proxy evaluation report *per se* – what did it conclude concerning the development impact of the government assistance to the NGOs? What did it recommend? How were these findings and recommendations received by the stakeholders, foremost Sida and the Swedish NGOs? What changes did these findings and recommendations trigger amongst the stakeholders, if any?
2. The Proxy evaluation *as a process* – as noted above, the Proxy evaluation was undertaken with an unusual degree of consultation with the stakeholders and efforts to disseminate and discuss the results. It is likely that such a process has effects of its own beyond and possibly even in spite of what is contained in a report. It reflects an attempt by Sida to interact with the NGOs, and the process also is likely to stimulate interaction between the NGOs beyond a direct response to the evaluation. What was the value of this process and what effects did it have? What lessons can be drawn for Sida in carrying out such stakeholder consultations?

⁴ Sida: *Preparatory paper for an assessment study of the impact of the 1984 Proxy evaluation*, Stockholm March 1998

3. The Proxy evaluation as *a reflection of a broader change process* in development aid in general and in the development assistance through NGOs specifically. The Proxy evaluation addressed a series of issues common for the discussion of effectiveness of development assistance such as poverty focus, environmental assessment, sustainability, gender approach, participation by beneficiaries in design, building capacity in local organisations, innovation and replicability, etc. Such a change process was at hand in the donor community at large, thus involving both Sida and the NGOs to some extent independently. What was the contribution of the Proxy evaluation to this broader change process?

The framework for the Study is contained in the flow chart below. The specific questions raised in the Terms of Reference can be referred to one or several of these boxes. In addition, the flow chart raises a series of other questions of importance for learning about more effective aid interventions and the improvement of evaluations as a tool for change as discussed in the previous section.

Figure 1. A flow chart to assess the Proxy evaluation as a tool for management learning



1.5 The approach

This Study has used Sida's preparatory study as a starting point and has been carried out through the following means:

1. An analysis of the Proxy evaluation report and its four country case studies (Bolivia, India, Kenya and Zimbabwe): The purpose of the analysis was to synthesise the underlying hypotheses of the report, its key findings, the explicit recommendations to Sida, and the implicit recommendations to the NGOs.⁵ The analysis formed the basis of a mail survey as described below.
2. A mail survey to 50 Swedish NGOs using an extensive questionnaire: This survey was directed to all the thirteen 'framework organisations' (see below for a definition of the term) and a sample of the 'non-framework organisations'. The survey covered the following aspects:
 - the knowledge of and attitudes to the Proxy evaluation amongst the NGOs and the process surrounding it (its preparation, its content, the dissemination of results);
 - an assessment of a set of development criteria derived from the Proxy evaluation and the official Swedish development objectives; their importance, the NGOs' performance and the perceived impact of the Proxy evaluation on the work of the NGOs in respect of these criteria;
 - an assessment of 25 key findings and statements by the Proxy report: to what extent do the NGOs agree or disagree with the report; and if they agree, has any change taken place since the report was issued;
 - an assessment by the NGOs of the recommendations to Sida in the Proxy report and to what extent Sida has acted upon them in the view of the NGOs;
 - the knowledge of and attitudes towards the new Sida guidelines for NGO support issued in April 1998; and
 - an overall assessment by the NGOs of the co-operation between Sida, the framework NGOs and other Swedish NGOs.

The questionnaire is given in Annex 5.

3. Personal interviews with Swedish NGOs: Twenty-six NGOs located in various parts of Sweden have been interviewed during the course of the study, using a semi-structured format. These interviews were carried out in three stages. Before the survey was designed interviews were held with a sample of frame and non-frame NGOs in order to define areas of potential impact. These interviews indicated that
 - the knowledge of what the Proxy evaluation contained was limited to very general statements, while the process surrounding it was quite vivid in the memories of the respondents;
 - the recollection of the perceived impact of the Proxy evaluation on the framework NGOs largely was of a general nature such as it stimulated the internal discussion and the overall interaction between the NGOs, but that the NGOs found it difficult to pin-point in more concrete terms direct influence. Contributing to this was a) that the study was issued four years earlier, and b) it was general in nature and one of many influences at this time.

⁵ The Proxy evaluation contains no direct recommendations to the NGOs as a result of an agreement during the course of the study. However, based on the findings, implicit recommendations can be derived.

- the awareness of the Proxy evaluation might be limited outside the realm of the framework NGOs.

The initial interviews governed the structuring of the survey in the sense that 1) the hypothesis of its limited spread outside the framework NGOs should be tested; 2) it included details of what the Proxy evaluation contained in terms of findings to help the NGOs to judge both perceived relevance of the findings and perceived impact on specific subject matters dealt with by the Proxy evaluation.

The second batch of interviews were carried out with a few NGOs to test the questionnaire. It led to certain reformulation of questions and structuring of the questionnaire. The third batch of interviews were carried out simultaneously with the survey. The purpose of these interviews was to capture underlying issues and issues of more general nature in the relationship between Sida and the NGOs. As many of the interviewed NGOs never had heard of the Proxy evaluation, the discussion of its impact could obviously not be a subject. Overall, the interviews showed clearly that tracing impact was a rather fruitless effort as the respondents had little to add to what they already had expressed in Sida's preliminary study.

Persons interviewed are given in Annex 3.

4. Analysis of written policy related material of 15 selected NGOs in respect of the Proxy evaluation's criteria for development impact: This was undertaken in order to assess the coherence between the organisations' official policies and the development impact criteria used by the Proxy evaluation. This documentation contains policy papers/idea programmes, guidelines, or annual reports.
5. Field studies in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe: These countries cover two of the four case studies by the Proxy evaluation (India and Zimbabwe), and one country with extensive Swedish NGO support, but not covered by the Proxy evaluation. All framework organisations, and a sample of other NGOs were asked to provide information on their local partner organisations in the above mentioned countries. Only an incomplete picture emerged from this, as some NGOs did not reply, and a few others refused to give names on their counterpart NGOs. Of practical and budgetary reasons interviews were held with the field offices of the major Swedish NGOs in these countries, a sample of local partner organisations in selected locations, mainly in the capitals. In India where the counterpart organisations showed to be spread widely, interviews were mainly conducted by mail, telephone or e-mail. A list of NGOs interviewed are given in Annex 3.
6. Interviews with the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida staff or former staff at headquarters and at the Swedish embassies in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe: Persons interviewed are given in Annex 3.
7. Review of relevant documentation, especially produced in the context of the Proxy evaluation: A list of documents is presented in Annex 4.

1.6 The survey methodology

The mail survey plays an important role in this study. It attempts to give both a quantitative and qualitative view of the perception and impact of the Riddell study⁶ by a fairly wide coverage of NGOs and a comprehensive list of questions. The questionnaire was tested both in person and by mail on several NGOs before it was launched in mid-August. The survey is based on a stratified sample: all the framework organisations were included in view of their importance for Sida's NGO support. The sample of the non-framework organisations was established from member lists of the umbrella NGOs⁷ in view of the fact that no comprehensive list of NGOs receiving Sida support exists, and it is even a matter of definition what constitutes an NGO. Amongst the NGOs under each umbrella organisation, a random sample was selected. The catalogue produced by Forum Syd, *Organisationer med u-landsinriktning 1997/98*, was also used in establishing the sample.

Of the 50 questionnaires sent out, eventually 33 were returned filled in, and hence the rate of response to the survey was 66 percent. Of the framework organisations all but one responded (92 percent rate of response), and amongst the non-frame organisation, 53 percent responded. In general, such a high rate of response is considered good and the results should be considered statistically significant to allow generalisations. However, we regret that not all NGOs took the time to respond to the survey in spite of several reminders, given the importance attached by Sida to the Proxy evaluation.

The survey was also used in an abridged form during the field work in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. These samples can not be claimed to be statistically satisfying, and in these cases the survey acted more as an illustration.

1.7 Reliability and validity

The study attempts to assess the impact of a source of information on a broad spectrum of cognitive and behavioural parameters amongst a large, and highly diverse group of organisations. Furthermore, the event producing this information took place four years ago amidst a number of other influences of relevance for the issues addressed in the Proxy study. The methodological problems of reliability and validity in such an assessment are considerable.

First, the time factor reduces to a considerable extent the reliability of the answers. The respondents might have problem to recollect the events and the influences after such a long period of time, especially as impact to a large extent can be defined as cognitive. Turn over in the NGOs might also reduce the reliability in the sense that the persons involved at the time of the Proxy evaluation might have left and the new staff know nothing or little about the events at that time. These problems are considerable. The study has tried to overcome the first by providing information of the findings of the Proxy evaluation to the respondents. The second problem was addressed by using a written survey which would allow the responding organisations time to identify those who participated. Without a scientific analysis of turnover in the NGOs, our impression is that there is a considerable continuity in these organisations at head-quarters, while less so in the field. In spite of this, we must conclude that the time factor makes the reliability an important issue. In short, the answers to the questions are not better than the respondents ability to recollect the events. An alternative approach would have been to request the participating NGOs that we were allowed to investigate

⁶ Throughout this report the term *Proxy evaluation* and '*Riddell*' study/report/evaluation are used

⁷ Umbrella NGOs has a function to channel applications of some other NGOs to Sida, screen them and act as an intermediary between Sida and the NGO community. For further description, see chapter 2.

any written internal documents such as protocols from meetings etc. We chose not to use such a method as it would have limited the study to only a small sample of NGOs - permitted we had been allowed to make such an inquiry.

Second, tracing direct causal relationships between the content of a report or its process of dissemination, and concrete actions by these NGOs in new policies, norms of conduct, etc. is difficult. The latter are generally a product of many influences, externally and internally, and causal relationships are almost impossible to define. The methodological problem was reinforced by the fact that the Proxy evaluation contained no recommendations to the NGOs. Again, the validity and reliability of our findings are not better than the ability and willingness of the respondents to recollect the events and linking the study to changes in perception, attitudes and behaviour.

Third, the assessment concerns, or should concern, organisations rather than individuals. This study attempts to assess the influence on organisational perceptions, norms of conduct, policies and actions. The responses of one, or in some cases a few individuals, might not necessarily reflect the full 'organisational view'. However, at least in some cases the NGOs made a point of involving several staff in responding to the survey, or at the interviews, which to some extent would compensate for this problem. Nevertheless, one person might perceive that the study was quite influential on the organisation, while another might dismiss such influence. An outsider would have tremendous problems to assess the 'truth' in such assessments. In general, we have tried to get a 'representative' answer from the participating organisation by interviewing their leadership, often more than one person. In the survey, we made a point of stimulating the respondents to take the survey as an opportunity for an internal discussions.

Fourth, assessing impact on perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and behaviour falls into the realm of psychology. The science of cognitive psychology is complex in the sense of determining how people change attitudes and behaviour. The science of organisational change not less complex. What a person claims, and believes is an influence, or lack of influence, might not be the actual truth. For example, critical comments about the work of NGOs might be rejected, but still affect behaviour, consciously or subconsciously. Furthermore, the respondents to the study are stakeholders in the Swedish NGO support. As such they also have vested interests. Respondents might have a motive to hide certain information, provide inaccurate information based on an ulterior motive, etc. In some of the interviews, this issue was discussed, as reflected in the following quotation:

When we talk with other NGOs there is a lot of criticism, for example, of Sida, but in the open forums everything appears to be harmonious, and all the critical comments gone....

The study has tried to overcome such potential biases by providing the respondents in the survey anonymity. Hence no single statement is traced to any particular organisation, and no reference is made to any particular organisation, except when the information is available in published material. However, in spite of potential risks of bias, we have taken the responses both in personal interviews and in the survey at face value. We have had no opportunity to assess to what extent their statements are reliable or valid. We must, nevertheless, stress that our respondents have overall shown a sincere wish to provide us with accurate information and engage in an open dialogue.

In summary, the current study is affected by problems of reliability and validity associated by the time that has elapsed between the studied event and the study itself, and by the method used in the form of oral and written interviews as the prime source of information.

A lesson of the above for Sida is that, should Sida undertake similar assessments of evaluations, they should preferably be conducted simultaneously with the evaluation itself. Only then can a reliable

base line be established (to measure any change against), and tracing effects and impact would be simplified by direct interaction with the key participants. It would also allow more accurate tracing of operational changes, for example by applying participatory methods in the evaluation.

1.8 The Swedish Development Assistance through the NGO system

The Swedish NGOs, notably the church related NGOs, have a history longer than Sida in the field of development co-operation, in some cases dating back to the last century. They were also instrumental in the creation of the official Swedish development assistance in the 1960s. As such, the NGOs have a special role in the Swedish development assistance system, recognised by the government and by Sida. They are also represented on the Board of Sida. The government support to the NGOs has as an essential objective to stimulate the interest in development issues in the Swedish population at large. Such interest is considered essential for the long-term willingness of the Swedish tax payers to maintain a high share of the Swedish GNP for development purposes. These factors underpin the political platform of the NGOs and provide for their considerable autonomy within the Swedish development assistance, a feature strongly guarded by the NGOs themselves and supported by the government.

There is a considerable pluralism amongst the NGOs involved in development assistance. While there are NGOs born as solidarity movements with developing countries and with development assistance as their sole function, development assistance is an extension of the work at home for a large number of the Swedish NGOs with people's movements as their background. For the latter, their aid is strongly influenced by their broader mission.

Sida channels official development assistance funds to Swedish NGOs through different *windows*:

- The *NGO window* by which Sida provides up to 80 percent of the costs of the NGOs' own development activities and projects: At the time of the Proxy evaluation, the budget for the NGO window was about SEK 800 million or 11 percent of Sida's total budget (1993/94). Some 2,000 development projects were funded annually through the NGO window involving some 500 NGOs in some 100 countries.⁸ In 1997, Sida allocated SEK about 820 million through this window.⁹
- Disaster relief and emergency assistance: In 1997 SEK 220 million was provided to the NGO through this window.
- Democracy and human rights: In 1997, Sida provided SEK 90 million through this window to the NGOs.
- The NGOs also receive Sida funds through the country programmes, and as channels for particular programmes such as gender, environment, and projects carried out by regional or functional departments in Sida. In 1997, this accounted for about SEK 100 million.
- The NGOs are also used as a channel for Swedish support to Eastern Europe. In 1997, this support via the NGOs amounted to SEK 90 million.

About 30 percent of all Sida funds were channelled through the NGOs at the time of the Proxy evaluation. In 1997 the total implemented official development assistance by NGOs is about SEK

⁸ The NGO window also contains support for information activities in Sweden by the NGOs. This aspect of the Swedish government assistance to the NGOs was not covered by the Proxy study.

⁹ Figures provided by Sida: *Statistik över utbetalningar till Enskilda Svenska organisationer 1997*, Sthlm 1998-06-30

1,150 million. Not only are the Swedish NGOs very important partners for Sida, the Swedish NGOs are dependent on government funding for their overseas activities, some almost entirely dependent on such funds.

In order to administer the very large volume of diverse NGO projects, Sida has made agreements with thirteen NGOs for longer term co-operation by which Sida provides a 'frame' support. These organisations are called framework organisations (*ramorganisationer*)¹⁰. They are listed in Annex 3. Of the framework NGOs, eight function as umbrella organisations for other NGOs in the sense that applications for Sida funding by non-framework NGOs should be channelled through designated umbrella organisations. On behalf of Sida, the latter review the application the NGOs' projects, ascertain that the projects are implemented and reported in line with guidelines and agreements, etc. Most of the eight umbrella framework organisations have natural client NGOs. For example, *Forum Syd* has been given the role by Sida to administer the large number of NGOs without a clear 'home'. As such *Forum Syd* has a special role amongst the framework organisations and in the Swedish NGO support, and is also provided special funds for this.

1.9 Structure of the report

This report is structured in the following way. This introduction is followed by a chapter reviewing the *process* of the Proxy evaluation, its background, the study itself, and the dissemination of the findings. In this context, it discusses the awareness of the Evaluation in the NGO community and general attitudes towards the study amongst the NGOs. The third chapter is an analysis of the Proxy evaluation itself, its methodology, underlying hypotheses, reliability and validity. The fourth chapter is structured around the nine development criteria on which the Proxy evaluation built its analysis of NGO effectiveness. It summarises what the report says on these criteria, the NGOs' views of these findings and the perceived impact the Proxy evaluation on their work for each of these criteria. This chapter also contains a review of the selected NGOs' treatment of these criteria in their written policy documents. The fifth chapter discusses the impact on the NGOs in general, as they perceive it. The sixth chapter reports on the findings of the field work in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The seventh chapter discusses the influence of the study on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which sets the broad policy for the NGO support and also provides the funds, and on Sida which administers these funds. In view of the fact that the Proxy evaluation's overriding objective was to look at the management of the government's NGO support, this chapter discusses more broadly the management system for NGO support, including the new Sida Guidelines for NGO support, and other issues in the relationship between Sida, the framework NGOs and other NGOs. The eighth chapter summarises the conclusions and makes some recommendations. The ninth chapter summarises some of the lessons learnt.

¹⁰ At the time of the Proxy evaluation, there was 14 Frame organisations, but BIFO (Assistance and Information through Voluntary Organisation) and the Swedish Volunteer Service merged in 1995 to form Forum Syd.

2. The process of the Proxy evaluation

2.1 Why was it undertaken and what was its purpose?

The Proxy evaluation was commissioned at a time when Sida was reviewing its support via the NGOs. This support had grown steadily during the 1980s and in the early 1990s. While Sida had undertaken various so called *capacity assessment studies* of the major NGOs since 1986 to determine their effectiveness for development assistance, no assessment of the effectiveness of the NGO projects in the field had been undertaken. A study in 1991 – *Solidarity with state aid* – reviewed organisational effectiveness and recommended, amongst other things, that evaluation should be made a vital part of the co-operation between Sida and the NGOs. *The capacity assessment studies* also indicated that the NGOs, while generally good in implementation, were weaker in project cycle issues such as setting measurable objectives and evaluating impact. In 1992-93 Sida initiated a series of seminars on evaluations for the NGOs, basically to support the capacity of the NGOs to undertake such evaluations themselves in response to these findings. There were two underlying motives for undertaking a comprehensive study of the NGO support. First, in view of the considerable budget channelled through the NGOs and Sida's overall responsibility to ensure the use of such funds, there was a felt need for feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of this support. This task was primarily the focus of Sida's evaluation unit. Second, such a study was seen as a contribution to the NGOs' capacity building, most notably in impact assessment, by *SEO-byrån*.

It is not entirely clear whether the initiative for the study emerged from the division handling the support to NGOs (*SEO byrån*) or the Evaluation unit in SIDA. In the interviews for this study, both claim to have taken the initiative.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Proxy evaluation was initiated with a considerable degree of participation of and consultations with the Swedish NGOs. A reference group was established with the framework organisations which discussed the outline of the study, the Terms of Reference and other issues. In the view of an NGO representative:

We took part in at least three seminars arranged by Sida/SEKA in which we could comment upon the methodology used and various practicalities....

According to Sida staff, there was a certain degree of hesitation from the NGOs of the value of a study of this nature, and even a question of whether Sida had the mandate to undertake such a review, given the official Swedish development policy governing the NGO support. There was also a considerable debate within Sida of the merit of undertaking such a study, especially with such an ambitious approach and what turned out to be a considerable budget.

There was a lot of anxiety within the organisation. Did we really have the mandate to do such a study, and how would the NGOs react? The decision-making took a long time, and the study finally had to be rushed, once there was a clear go ahead. We probably discussed the study for more than a year before it took off.

There was an overriding implicit political agenda behind the Proxy evaluation. First, it was a step in a longer term process of changing the relationship between the NGOs and Sida from Sida's point of view in the sense that Sida wanted a more pro-active role than in the past. The NGO support had grown to such an extent that the organisation felt an obligation to know better, and to influence the NGO support. However, given the autonomous position of the NGOs in the Swedish aid

¹¹ The Proxy evaluation was initiated and carried out by SIDA. In July 1995, the Swedish development assistance organisations were amalgamated into one, Sida. Throughout this report the acronym Sida will be applied.

system, such a pro-active role had to be mended in a careful way, preferably in a process of consultations. As later discussed, a ‘compromise’ in this was that the Proxy evaluation should not contain any recommendations to the NGOs, only to Sida. Second, another implicit agenda was a question whether the NGOs were as effective as notably political stakeholders claimed them to be. Aid through NGOs was driven by some of the Swedish political parties as inherently more effective, which had contributed to the rapid growth of such aid. At the time the Proxy evaluation was carried out, questions were increasingly being asked, not least in Sida, whether such political statements were well grounded. The first of these ‘agendas’ were not made explicit in the Terms of Reference, but is well articulated by the persons involved. The second was expressed in the T.o.R. indirectly by expressing some assumptions concerning the effectiveness of the NGO support as discussed below.

2.2 Defining the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the study were subject to a considerable consultation process between the two units in Sida as well as between Sida and some of the NGOs. The consultants also participated in the writing of the T.o.R.. In the words of one Sida staff member:

We know about the special character of the Swedish NGOs... Riddell was an authority on NGOs support internationally and on evaluations. We were not entirely clear on the questions on evaluation we should ask, and Riddell didn't fully understand the character of the Swedish NGO support. It took some discussion until we came to the final ToR..

Evaluations of development co-operation are management tools with two basic functions. They function as an *audit*: to assess what has been achieved through the development assistance, whether the investments have accomplished established objectives and whether the support has been cost-effective. Evaluation is also a tool for *management learning*. The second function requires the first as a basis, but an audit does not necessarily have to aim at stimulating learning. The Proxy evaluation had both of the above functions: its objectives were, according to its Terms of Reference, to

...assess the effectiveness of the Swedish NGO supportand to provide key lessons, conclusions and recommendations for the future role of the support.¹²

The Terms of Reference specified that the evaluation should assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Swedish NGO... *and provide an assessment of its strength and weaknesses as an aid form*. Effectiveness was seen in relation to the broader Swedish development objectives and of the co-operating countries, while efficiency was judged in the context of the overall costs of the projects as compared to the benefits. Effectiveness, furthermore should be judged against criteria such as environmentally sound and sustainable development, gender equality, poverty, local capacity building, building democracy and respect for human rights. Sustainability was given a high priority in the Terms of Reference for the study. It was to be judged against a large number of criteria such as capacity building in local organisations, shared financing and local resource mobilisation, institutional viability beyond project financing, local participation by the ultimate beneficiaries and replicability of activities.

It was noted in the Terms of Reference that the Swedish NGO support was based on certain largely un-proven assumptions such as it was assumed to be *more cost-effective and efficient due to lower costs* (than other development assistance, presumably through Sida and/or international organisations),

¹² Riddell, Beebington & Peck, *Promoting Development by Proxy*, Sida, 1995, Annex 1.

more flexible, innovative and better in reaching the poorest groups, and more effective as it is carried out in direct contact with the target groups.

The Terms of Reference were not the only guide for the consultants. In the process of carrying out the study, the consultants were given additional directives, for example that the study should not deal with Sida's internal administration of the NGO support. Furthermore, as noted above, the consultants were instructed not to include any recommendations to the NGOs, only to Sida. The latter was a compromise reflecting the ambiguity of what Sida should do or not do as to the NGO support.

2.3 The study

The study team under the leadership of Roger Riddell of ODI, was carried out in co-operation with a Swedish consultancy firm, ICS Interconsult. The latter was supposed to provide the Swedish link, logistics support and was eventually responsible for a descriptive chapter in the report of the Swedish NGO system. The choice of a non-Swedish team as the lead team in the process was deliberate by Sida. It was believed that it would provide a more independent view and therefore be more acceptable to the NGOs. Sida believed it would be difficult to find a Swedish consultant which had no links to a particular group of NGOs, making objectivity difficult to assure. However, in view of the special character of the Swedish NGO support, Sida also wanted a Swedish resource team to support the British.

The study was carried out over a period of seven months in 1994. Its empirical basis was the four country cases of Bolivia, India, Kenya and Zimbabwe. These countries were pre-selected by Sida. The study team eventually selected 37 NGO projects in these countries for assessment of development impact, ranging from 13 in Zimbabwe to 7 in Kenya. The projects were chosen to include all 14 frame organisations and with as wide a spread of sectors as possible. However, in the end only 12 of the frame organisations could be covered. The evaluation report contains an extensive description of the difficulties in choosing projects due to the fact that no comprehensive listing of all the projects existed. The report also makes it clear that the selected projects cannot be seen as a representative sample of Sida's NGO support, but are biased towards 'better' projects. The methodological problems in the choice of countries were elaborated in a comprehensive inception report by Roger Riddell, issued in May 1994.

The study resulted in four country reports and a synthesis report. The synthesis report, entitled *Promoting Development by Proxy – An Evaluation of the Development Impact of Government Support to Swedish NGOs*, was written by two of the team members, Roger Riddell and Anthony Bebbington of ODI, with contributions in one chapter by Lennart Peck of ICS Interconsult. This report was issued in February 1995.

The consultative and participative approach was continued in the process of finalising the report. Sida invited the framework organisations and other NGOs that directly had been involved in the case material to a seminar to discuss the draft report. According to the authors of the study, most of the framework NGOs participated in this meeting. In the words of one of the Sida staff responsible for the study:

We were nervous before this seminar. The subject was sensitive, and Riddell had written a quite critical report of the Swedish NGOs. It went quite well, however. Not least due to Riddell's way of handling it. He was quite unassuming and not defensive of the study's way. It was a good outcome, and in the end little had to be changed in the draft.

The draft report was subject for various dissemination seminars as discussed further below. The report was published in Sida's evaluation report series in 1995. The published version was to some extent a shortened version of the report issued by ODI. While not much reduced in text, the published versions had omitted certain reservations in the ODI version concerning the problems to generalise from the 37 case studies. These editorial changes were made without consultations with the authors of the Proxy evaluation. At the time the current study was commissioned Sida was not aware of the differences between the two versions. The current study has used the Sida published version only. As can be noted from comments on the draft report, Roger Riddell, claims that in the Sida published version *a number of quite important points and emphases made by the consultants have been omitted.*

2.4 Disseminating the results

No record exists in Sida of how many copies of the Proxy report were distributed, nor of the distribution of the case countries. Generally, the Proxy report is believed to have had a wide distribution. It is still available at Sida and, according to Sida staff, there is still a sporadic demand for it. It is assumed that their circulation of the country case studies is much less wide than for the synthesis report.

Sida arranged several means for dissemination of the report and its results, once it was finalised. These were both aimed at the Swedish NGOs and at the local NGOs in the case countries. The most important of the former, besides distribution of the report, was a two day seminar presentation in May 1995 in Stockholm (The *Skansen* seminar). At the seminar, during which the ODI evaluation team presented the report, some 80 persons participated, including representatives of all the frame NGOs and a few non-frame organisations which had been subject for the case studies. Sida was represented at the seminar by over 20 staff from different departments. The seminar was given a high profile, reflected, for example, in an opening statement by Sida's Director General. Sida also commissioned a consultancy firm (ISO Management Group) to provide a report of the proceedings at the meeting. A special report by Peter Westermarck on the seminar was submitted to Sida in June.¹³ Also the seminar had a participative aspect as the agenda was determined by a joint work group of NGOs, Sida and the consultants.

Some conclusions from the seminar are of relevance for the impact analysis. Thus, for example, at the seminar strong recommendations were put forward that new guidelines for Sida's NGO support should be worked out in co-operation with the Swedish and local NGOs. However, to judge from the reporting from the seminar, the meeting was to a large extent discussions of issues with few concrete recommendations emanating from these discussions. A thrust of the seminar seems, according to the report, be that *the Swedish NGOs do not want more control, but wish that the exchange of information between the NGOs and Sida be enhanced...*

Sida also arranged seminars in which the report exclusively or partially was discussed in three of the four case countries (Kenya, Zimbabwe and Bolivia). The most ambitious of those was the seminar in Bolivia, in which several of the ODI evaluators participated in a two day seminar exclusively dealing with the report.. In India, the intention was to run a seminar on the evaluation, but so far no such activity has taken place. In the seminars in Kenya and Zimbabwe the team members were not invited to participate, nor were they provided with any information of the outcome of the seminars. In general it seems that in Bolivia the country study has been subject for considerable

¹³ Westermarck, P.: *Promoting Development by Proxy - A two day seminar with Swedish NGOs*, ISO June 1995

activities in which the Swedish embassy was quite active, possibly triggered by the fact that the Swedish aid to Bolivia largely is composed of NGO support.

The Proxy report was also subject for a special study in Sida Evaluation Yearbook 1995 by Jan Valdelin, and surfaced in the seminar with the NGOs in early 1998 in relation to the OECD study, noted earlier. Thus, 4 years after the study was conducted, it is still 'alive'. In spite of no systematic reference material, we believe the longevity of the study is also something unique in Sida.

Sida gave the Proxy evaluation considerably more attention in promoting a consultative and participative approach, and also in disseminating the results than what was normal for evaluations at the time it was carried out, even those of a similar resource magnitude as the Proxy evaluation. It seems also to have been kept on the agenda longer than usual. There are several reasons for this:

- As noted earlier, the NGO support is steeped in a problematic organisational form: There is a controversy regarding how much Sida should interfere with the NGOs. Sida found a consultative and participative method involving the NGOs as essential under such circumstances; this was part of the political agenda behind the evaluation.
- The evaluation team had a high status with Roger Riddell as an internationally well recognised lead name. Informally, Sida staff agree that a report of the same quality, but with less well known authors, was unlikely to have been given such prominence;
- The study deals with an uncommon theme: assessing the impact of NGOs' work in the field, a subject for which there is (or was) little information available;
- The implicit objective of the study was to encourage an on-going process in Sida assisting the NGOs to enhance their 'development capacity'. Learning was much more essential than auditing and learning required participation, hence involvement of the stakeholders was essential for such learning;

It should also in this context be noted that an important factor was that the participative method, especially focusing on dissemination, was a model that the Evaluation Unit wanted to test. According to one of its staff:

Some of us believed that the discussions and feed-back of the results of an evaluation was as important as the evaluation itself. We pushed this agenda, and wanted an ambitious approach. We were particularly happy that the results were discussed not only with the Swedish NGOs, but also in the field.

Did Sida learn from this model testing? This is a difficult question to answer, partly as Sida underwent a re-organisation shortly after the study was published and a new Evaluation Section was set up in the new Sida, with new management and to a large extent also with new staff. Nevertheless, the evaluation has been given considerable attention in the new set-up, not least reflected in the preparatory study noted earlier. The participative element of the Proxy evaluation has been maintained in this process.

To judge from the response to the survey undertaken in this study, the comments by the NGOs on the draft report, and also of the discussion during the seminar in January, the concern that Sida expressed at the time of the Proxy evaluation over NGO autonomy and unwillingness to engage in assessment of their activities has dramatically changed. The atmosphere today rather is characterised by a strong demand for such interaction from the NGOs. The issues seems rather to be to what extent Sida has the capacity to respond to such a demand.

2.5 Effectiveness of the consultation and dissemination process

Given the high profile of the Riddell study and the concerned efforts for dissemination of its results, how well is the Riddell report known amongst Swedish NGOs and to what extent has the report triggered a discussion within the NGOs? A series of questions of this nature was asked in the survey conducted in this study. The results are summarised in table 2 below. In view of the stratified sample, a distinction is made between the framework and the non-framework organisations in the presentation of the results throughout this report.

Table 2. Survey results: Awareness and consultations of the Proxy in the NGOs

Share of NGOs which have responded positively to the following questions:	Frame	Non-frame
Is aware of the report	100 %	45 %
Has access to the report in the organisation	100 %	22 %
The report has been discussed in the organisation	100 %	17 %
Was consulted prior to the study	70 %	11 %
Was interviewed by the study team	83 %	11 %
Was asked to comment on the draft report	67 %	6 %
Was invited to the workshop presenting the report	100 %	11 %
Participated in the workshop	92 %	11 %
Frame organisation has initiated discussion with non-frame organisation according to the non-frame respondents		17 %
Has sent report to local counterpart organisations	17 %	0 %
Has initiated discussions with local counterpart organisations	42 %	6 %

The results above show that amongst the framework organisations the awareness of and access to the Riddell study is 100 percent. Also, to a large extent these organisations were consulted prior to the study, were interviewed during its course and had a chance to comment on the draft report. All of them were also invited to at least one dissemination workshop and all, except one, participated. From the perspective of participation and awareness of the study, the survey indicates an excellent result amongst the framework NGOs.

The situation is quite different for the non-framework organisations. A majority of the respondents to the survey had never heard of the Riddell report. Only a fifth of them had access to the report in their organisation, and even fewer have discussed the report within the organisation. One in ten surveyed non-framework organisations had been invited to a dissemination workshop and an equal number had been consulted in the process of carrying out the study. Given the fact that the framework NGOs constitute in terms of numbers a small percent of the total, the awareness of the Riddell study overall in the Swedish NGO community is limited.

A more extensive consultation process by Sida in the design of the study and by the team conducting it, might have been unrealistic given the large number of NGOs in Sweden and the time pressure on the study. However, the few non-framework organisations that have access to the report or were invited to any dissemination seminar of the report findings is surprisingly low. Less than one of five NGOs claim that their framework organisation initiated any discussion with them based on the Proxy evaluation.

As noted earlier, in order to address its own administrative capacity limitations, Sida has established a decentralised management system for the NGO support through the framework organisations, and notably the ‘umbrella’ organisations. From the point of view of Sida, the limited involvement of the non-framework NGOs in the study and in the dissemination process has a rational explanation. But the question does arise as to why only a minority of framework NGOs sent it to their client NGOs or use it explicitly as a basis for discussions with them. This issue will be discussed further below.

2.6 Dissemination to partner organisations

Going down one step further in the ‘hierarchy of proxies’, the number of frame and non-frame-work NGOs which claim to have sent the Riddell report to local counterpart organisations in developing countries is low. Two of the twelve responding framework organisations claim to have sent the report to local counterpart organisations in developing countries. Amongst the non-frame organisations none has sent the report. On the other hand, 40 percent of the framework organisations claim to have initiated some form of discussion with their partners, while only a few (6 percent) of the non-frame NGOs claim to have initiated such a discussion. As is further discussed in chapter 4 the field interviews in India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe corroborate these findings.

2.7 The perceived quality of the dissemination seminars

The NGOs were asked to comment on the dissemination seminars in the survey. Reference was in particular made to the *Skansen* seminar in May 1995. 40 percent of those who had participated in one or several such seminars claimed them to be *very useful*, while 60 percent thought they were *moderately useful*. None of the participants saw these seminars as not useful. In their comments on the usefulness of the workshops the NGOs responded:

The seminar stimulated important discussions about our roles and the lack of co-ordination between different activities;

It was interesting to hear Roger Riddell who has a broad international experience. The discussions were not that useful, they were too general;

It was a very positive and encouraging atmosphere at the workshop; there were plenty of opportunities to learn from one another, what we are doing and discuss common issues;

We realised how different the NGOs are and what they do, and how they define their problems. We learned from the others and shared experiences.

The response from the survey indicates that the interactive process between the NGOs was one essential element of the evaluation process. Such viewpoints were also expressed in the semi-structured interviews. Overall, the interaction between NGOs is considered limited by the NGOs themselves with few natural fora for such interaction. The activities surrounding the Proxy evaluation provided such an opportunity over a period of time and was facilitated by the fact that the study was sufficiently broad to engage a broad segment of the NGOs.

Was the dissemination sufficient?

The survey asked whether enough had been done to discuss the Riddell report in the view of the NGOs. Half of the respondents in the survey (who were aware of the report) thought so, while half thought not enough had been done. Staff are generally wary of meetings and workshops, and a response by half of the participants that they would like to see more dissemination activities, in spite of all the activities with the Proxy evaluation, is surprising. Some of the suggestions were:

There should be repeater seminars and meetings on the key issues.

There should be follow up on the findings in the report.

more could have been done to develop practical instruments for implementation such as guidelines and methods, for example for poverty alleviation.

In spite of the unusual activities for dissemination of the Proxy evaluation, there is a considerable demand for more. It is unclear if such a demand is specific for the Proxy evaluation, but a hypothesis is that Sida could do much more on dissemination of evaluation studies. In general, a participative evaluation is likely to trigger demand for follow up activities, further studies, training activities, etc. An essential means to enhance the effectiveness of evaluations as a management tool for change is to act on and respond to such stimuli. On the other hand, if such demand from stakeholders is not met, the risk is that the participants might be discouraged in the sense that not only an opportunity was lost, but the attitude towards Sida as a knowledge based service organisation is impacted negatively. In view of Sida's general limited administrative capacity, this risk is considerable. A means to overcome this might be to plan for actions already at the design stage of an evaluation. i.e. a budget for follow up activities might be provided, allocations for responsibility might be suggested, etc.

2.8 Perceived usefulness of the evaluation

In the survey, the NGOs which had knowledge of the Riddell study were asked to give their opinion of the evaluation based on the five criteria as indicated below and rate it on a scale from very high to poor:

Table 3. Survey results: NGO attitudes towards the Proxy evaluation (Percent of NGOs aware of the study)

Criteria	Very high	High	Moderate	Not so good	Poor
Description of the realities of Swedish NGOs' work	—	48	52		—
Understanding of what Swedish NGOs are all about	—	19	75	6	—
The usefulness of the study	19	50	31		—
Focus on the most important issues	—	69	31		—
Usefulness for the work of the NGOs		44	50	6	—

As seen in the above table, the NGOs which know about the study, gave the study a fair to good rating with only a couple of NGOs rating it as *not so good* for a few of these criteria. None rated it as *poor*. The evaluation was rated particularly highly in terms of the *usefulness of the evaluation* and it *focused on the most important issues* in the view of the NGOs. The least good rating is *how well the team understood the Swedish NGO system*. It is also noteworthy that almost half of the NGOs which knew of the study claimed it had a *high usefulness* for their work.

Comparing the rating of the framework and the non-framework NGOs, there is a clear difference in their views. The framework organisations generally give a better rating to the report than the non-frame organisations which are aware of the report. The latter have little to say about the usefulness of the report. From the above, we conclude that there seems to be a clear correlation

between the perceived usefulness of the study and participation in the events. A hypothesis is that publishing and distributing a report alone is not effective in creating awareness and interest in a study, even if it deals with a central theme such as the Proxy evaluation. Participation is essential. Some of the views expressed by the NGOs were:

There are so many reports being distributed. We often don't have time to read them all.

It was of value to listen to Riddell presenting the report, and having a chance to discuss it with the team.

The possibility of having a chance to discuss these issues with other NGOs and with Sida was very appreciated and useful.

We participated both in the study and in several seminars, and it was a very good input to our organisation.

These expressions contrast to the following response by a non-participant:

They didn't ask us about anything, so the evaluation can't be valid for us.

The findings give a strong base for a participative approach in evaluations. This is already well known in Sida, as reflected in Sida's Evaluation Manual. Nevertheless, this study indicates that this aspect can be given even stronger emphasis.

Should Sida undertake evaluations such as the Proxy?

Of the respondents in the survey, all but one are of the opinion that it is useful for Sida to undertake studies such as the Proxy evaluation. The reasons given were:

It gives Sida a better picture of the realities of the NGOs; It is also important for Sida to have control of the NGO support.

It might trigger important policy and strategy discussions within the NGOs.

It gauges performance and takes stock of the NGO work in a broad perspective.

It is important to evaluate all kinds of development assistance so NGO work should also be reviewed by independent evaluators.

It improves the quality of the NGOs' work by addressing important issues.

It helps to measure the development impact of NGO work and complements what we study ourselves.

It is important to get a different perspective from outsiders of what we do from time to time.

The reluctance that the NGOs might have felt at the outset of the evaluation according to Sida staff, was either an incorrect reading of the situation, or a major change in attitudes has taken place between the early 1990s and the end of the '90s. Our hypothesis is that a change in fact has taken place due to a number of factors which are further discussed below, but in which the Riddell study was one important element. The positive attitudes of the NGOs to similar studies as the Proxy evaluation is a resounding voice for more interaction with Sida. In view of Sida's long term objective of supporting the capacity development in the NGOs in general, and strengthening the evaluation aspect in particular, the response from the NGOs is encouraging.

2.9 The choice of study team

Asked whether it was an advantage or disadvantage of a British team undertaking the study (as compared to a Swedish team), half of the NGOs claimed it was an advantage, while half saw it as a disadvantage. The pros and cons as expressed by the NGOs were as follows:

Table 4. Survey results: Attitudes towards the study team

Advantage with a British team	Disadvantage
It gives new perspectives and a fresh approach	It is stupid to have a foreign team writing in English and interviewing Swedish organisations in a foreign language
Foreigners are less biased and they had no preconceived views	Foreigners are handicapped as they really don't understand the Swedish people's movement well...
The team was more qualified than a Swedish team would have been	They lacked relationship to Swedish NGOs
It gave more weight, made it more interesting	
They could make interesting international comparisons	

The main criticism against a foreign team – that the Riddell team didn't understand the special character of the NGOs in Sweden, its autonomy from government, its basis in the popular movements, etc. is also confirmed by a representative of Sida:

Riddell admitted he didn't understand this unique system. We talked about it at length, and he understood of course intellectually, but not emotionally the meaning of it. This is also reflected in the report.

A lesson of this might be that mixed Swedish-foreign teams have several advantages. An effort in this direction was also made in the Proxy evaluation, although superficially as the Swedish participant was providing only limited, descriptive and logistical inputs.

3. An analysis of the Proxy evaluation and its findings

3.1 Effectiveness, efficiency and development impact

The methodology chosen by the Riddell team suggests that at the outset the team made their own interpretation of the task outlined in the Terms of Reference. Thus, while the T.o.R. focuses on the concept of effectiveness and efficiency, the Riddell study became largely concentrated on the issue of assessing development impact, and particularly with poverty as the core criteria. While development impact analysis is a necessary condition to assess effectiveness in this context, it is not sufficient. The resources spent, and the efficiency of the resources spent is the other part of the equation. While the Proxy evaluation recognises the input dimension in its discussion of methodology, it is largely silent on this issue in terms of its findings.

Effectiveness can be viewed from two perspectives: One is measuring the achievement of NGO support in relation to the stated objectives for the support as expressed in project agreements between Sida and the NGOs. As noted by Riddell, the Swedish NGO projects have, overall, a high degree of goal fulfilment in the sense that the projects deliver the outputs they state should be delivered. Whether this is undertaken in a cost-effective manner – the relationship of the resources spent and the results achieved – is not discussed. On the broader issue, assessing the impact of the projects against certain criteria for development⁷ the Riddell study argues the results are much less: the more development criteria are used, the less the performance. By definition, this implies low cost-effectiveness.

While the Terms of Reference were clear in their focus, it appears that Sida paid little attention in assessing to what extent the proxy study lived up to its mandate. According to interviews, the discussion of the draft report provided little criticism of the study, and the final report was largely the same as the draft.

3.2 The criteria for development impact

The core of Riddell's methodology is formed by nine criteria of development impact. These criteria were derived from the Terms of Reference, which make some reference to the overall development objectives of Swedish aid, some reference to the general assumptions behind the NGO support such as reaching the poorest, and a rather extensive list of criteria for sustainability. While Riddell discussed the selection of criteria at length, the nine criteria chosen by Riddell have several flaws, in our view. Firstly, it is not a homogenous set of criteria with similar importance, but a list comprising, on the one hand, of officially established development objectives of Sweden such as assisting the poor, and, on the other, technical aspects such as whether pre-project assessments took place prior to the start up of projects or not. The latter has nothing to do with impact and a project which uses appraisal is not intrinsically *better development* than one without. Secondly, the criteria chosen only partly reflect the official development criteria of Swedish aid, and omit some of these objectives as is further indicated below.

Table 5. Comparing official Swedish development objectives and the Riddell criteria

(Figures in brackets when the objective was officially established)

Swedish official development objectives	The Proxy study development criteria	Comments
Improve the quality of life of poor peoples (1962) "quality of life includes people's opportunities for making a secure living.. to be in good health, and to have access to education and other social services (1995)	Assisting the poor and in particular assisting the poorest	The poorest not an official objective. PARTIAL COHERENCE
Economic growth (1977)		NO COHERENCE
Socio-economic equality (1977)		NO COHERENCE
Economic and political independence (1977)		NO COHERENCE
Democratic development (1977)	If democracy and human rights have been considered in design and execution of projects	COHERENCE
Sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment (1988)	Consideration of environmental factors and impact on the environment by projects	COHERENCE
Fostering equal rights for women and men (1996)	Gender issues incorporated in projects... and impact on prevailing gender relations	At the time of the Evaluation not an official objective, but an important criteria for several decades; COHERENCE
	Beneficiaries participation in different aspects of projects	Not an official objective, but indirectly seen as an important contributing factor COHERENCE
	Training of local people, potential for replacing Swedish TA and lessons learnt	A technical criteria, but linked to capacity building; No official development objective, but an essential operational one for Sida – PARTIAL COHERENCE
	Innovative, flexible, adaptable, and replicable	Technical aspects, no Swedish official objective, but generic honorary words in Sida LOW COHERENCE
	The use of pre-project assessment, monitoring and final evaluation	No objective – technical project cycle aspects also applied by Sida. LOW COHERENCE
	Sustainability	Not (yet) specific objective, but indirectly as a pre-condition COHERENCE

The table above shows that there is a certain lack of coherence between the official Swedish development objectives and the criteria used by Riddell. However, Riddell did not invent the criteria applied, but basically derived them from the T.o.R. of the study. Like many other evaluations, the writers of the T.o.R. wanted to incorporate as much as possible, while the product was a compromise of different views. This resulted in a certain mis-match of small and large, and also in certain inconsistencies. As a result, the Proxy evaluation can be criticised from the following perspectives:

- It judged rather ceremoniously general *development impact* based on these criteria. In our view this is analytically not correct;
- It judged fulfilment of Swedish development objectives based on these criteria. This is also only partially correct in our view;
- development impact is a relative term. The study made no effort to assess the NGO projects relative to, for example, other development projects financed by Sida.
- the criteria are largely standard development concepts, and little attention has been paid to criteria that might reflect the uniqueness of the NGO assistance: For example, mobilising solidarity amongst members of the Swedish society; building civil society, enhancing democratic pluralism, etc.

3.3 Coherence between case material and synthesis report

A second issue is to what extent the criteria established were used systematically in the case studies. As noted earlier, the Proxy evaluation is built on the impact assessment of 37 projects in four countries: Bolivia, India, Kenya and Zimbabwe, using the nine criteria which form the core of Riddell's methodology. Reviewing these case studies we find that the evaluators sometimes had severe problems in operationalising the criteria, especially the concept of sustainability. Riddell draws conclusions about financial, institutional and managerial sustainability. However, these concepts are not applied systematically in the case material. For example, in the Bolivia case study there is no discussion at all about financial sustainability; in one of the Kenyan cases nothing but finances is discussed. In another Kenyan case the analysis is limited to two phrases about the sustainability of the project being unsure.

3.4 Generalisations

The Terms of Reference for the Proxy evaluation stated the objectives of the evaluation as follows:

To provide SIDA with an independent and comprehensive review and analysis of the Swedish development support through Swedish NGOs and to assess the effectiveness of the Swedish NGO support. The general purpose of the evaluation is not to judge individual organisations and projects, but to use project data (from country studies) to validate general conclusions.

The Terms of Reference at the same time specify that these country studies shall take place in Kenya, Zimbabwe, India and Bolivia.

Riddell et al make it clear in the synthesis report that the selected 37 projects cannot be considered representative of the full realm of Sida supported NGO projects as they were not based on a random or even a representative sample. For example, Riddell et al believe that the selected projects are likely to be biased in favour of projects with better development impact. Furthermore, that the countries selected were biased towards countries with a high share of NGO funds. The conclusion from this is, according to Riddell et al, *that it would be illegitimate to make wider generalisations,*

conclusions and recommendations solely on the basis of the (biased sample) data and information obtained... The authors argue that *conclusions and recommendations can be made, provided they are understood as provisional, rather than firm, and that they remain open to revision, as and when additional recommendation comes at hand.*

In the comments to the draft report *Managing the NGO partnership*, Riddell reiterates the reservation against drawing conclusions from the Proxy study for the NGO support in general. Thus, *the proxy study abounds in words, sentences, paragraphs and pages cautioning against being too ready to generalise beyond these (37) projects.*

A dilemma emerges in this. From the Terms of Reference it is clear that Sida in commissioning the evaluation is not interested in specific NGO projects, but generalisations of the effectiveness of the NGO support which are sufficiently valid for the whole NGO population. However, in its choice of projects, the Proxy evaluation made such generalisations *illegitimate*, to use the study's own word. The Proxy evaluation did not make this methodological choice out of contempt for the T.o.R. As elaborated in the Proxy report, Sida lacked a comprehensive list of all projects under its NGO support which prevented a random sampling by the evaluators. Furthermore, the Terms of Reference stipulated a pre-selection of countries. Two conclusions can be drawn from this:

- Riddell's assessment of the effectiveness of the Swedish NGO support can not be generalised, and should, in line with the authors' own statements, basically be limited to their studied 37 projects. At best, the conclusions from this sample could be expressed as hypotheses for the total population, not findings. This must be clearly be taken into account in an assessment of the impact of the Proxy evaluation. The issue of relevance, validity and reliability of the findings – not for the 37 projects - but for the NGO support in general must be at the centre of an inquiry. This has also geared the current study.
- In combining overall broad objectives for an evaluation by a stipulated methodology, Sida biased the evaluation process. Unless the requested methodology had been clearly conducive to produce what the T.o.R. asked for, Sida short-circuited its whole evaluation process. This leads to the lesson that Terms of Reference must be internally logic. They can not ask for something that the requested methodology prevents them from producing.

3.5 The discussion on validity and reliability in Sida

The purpose of the discussion above is not to describe the Riddell study as sub-standard. Any evaluation has similar analytical problems which reflect that studies of this nature frequently are conducted in a short span of time, deal with very complex issues, and have to respond to T.o.R.'s which in themselves often contain inconsistencies. However, of interest is that the Riddell analysis has received surprisingly little critical analysis by Sida and by the NGOs, given its rather sweeping negative statements about the quality of the Swedish NGO support. An exception to this is a review of the NGO support in Sida's Annual Report on Evaluation of Sida's Development Assistance, 1995, by Jan Valdelin, then head of the consultancy firm Interconsult which had participated in the Proxy evaluation. He claims in this review that the methodology applied by the Proxy evaluation through a study of 37 projects (out of some 2000) is not acceptable to validate findings, only to make some hypotheses. He also questions the validity of of Riddell et al's criticism of the Swedish NGO support from the point of view of his frame of reference:

In my view, this criticism is largely misdirected as it does not take into sufficient consideration the fact that Swedish support is based on the popular movements' own activities plus that this system is probably a precondition for maintenance of the positive public attitude to development assistance in Sweden. ... the evaluators' criticism in this respect is far too limited by an Anglo-Saxon perspective, dominated by ideas which have been formulated by representatives of NGOs which are specialised development agencies and donors which co-operate with NGOs in the implementation of projects which are defined by the donors and not be the NGOs' own original activities.¹⁴

This critical view of the validity of the findings of the Proxy evaluation's appears to a large extent have been lost over time. The authors themselves warned for drawing too general conclusions from the biased sample, and saw their findings as not more than preliminary, subject for validation. As noted above, in the publishing of the report, Sida, reduced to some extent these warnings by omitting some of the authors' reservations. It is furthermore our view that over time what was postulated as hypotheses have become 'truths' about the NGO support in general.

It is also noteworthy that the Terms of Reference for the current study has very little to say about the relevance, validity and reliability of the Proxy evaluation. Instead, the underlying theme in the T.o.R is an assessment of the effectiveness in create change and impact. Undertaking such an assessment is certainly justified, but it cannot be de-linked from the issue of validity.

In summary, we share Valdelin's concern. The effectiveness of the Swedish NGO support is still to a large extent unknown, especially related to its ability to achieve the overriding purpose of the Swedish NGO support such as mobilising solidarity, building civil society etc.. Also, the cost-effectiveness and efficiency is unknown as the study provided little evidence of the input aspects and costs of the projects. Nor does the study put the Swedish NGO support in relation to other Swedish development assistance to allow some assessment of relative effectiveness. The study undertakes an international comparison to NGO support in some other countries, but makes it quite clear that such comparisons can, of methodological reasons, not be used as benchmarks.

The conclusion from this discussion is that there is a clear risk that the findings of evaluations of complex processes are given too much weight as valid truths by stakeholders, especially stakeholders at a distance from the activities themselves. This, in its turn, might lead to policy decisions which are ill-founded with potentially profound counterproductive effects. Development assistance issues are at particular risk as evaluations are basically the only independent feed-back on these processes. The lessons from this is: a) that Sida should pay considerable attention to the issue of reliability and validity as stressed earlier; and b) evaluations should be given more resources and be undertaken more frequently. This would allow for a variety of views, and also studies with more ambitious scientific approach. The Proxy evaluation comprises in financial terms about 0,1% of the allocations to NGO support over a three year period. While no bench marks can be given, an allocation of ten or twenty times that amount might be justified if this is the only independent source of feed back of aid effectiveness.

¹⁴ Valdelin, Jan: *Development Co-operation through voluntary organisations and NGOs*, in Sida: Annual report 1995, Evaluation of SIDA's Annual Development Assistance, SIDA, Stockholm 1995

4. Development issues in the Swedish NGO support

4.1 The method applied

While the criteria used by the Proxy evaluation only partly reflect development impact, they indicate the ways in which the NGO support functions as conventional development projects. They can be used as a checklist of various aspects of the development assistance, some clearly linked to the broader objectives of Swedish aid (poverty, gender, environment and democracy), others to key concepts in current development thinking (sustainability, participation, local capacity building), and finally some that could be described as important technical issues in development work (innovation, replicability, appraisal, monitoring and impact evaluation)¹⁵. This chapter will review the Riddell report's assessment of the performance of the Swedish NGOs in respect of these criteria. The chapter also reports on the views of the NGOs on the Proxy study's analysis according to the survey: do they agree or not, and if they agree, do they think the situation is better now than before the study was conducted (1994).

The chapter considers how important the NGOs consider the criteria for their work, how they rate their own performance, the performance of their local counterparts, and how they perceive the influence of the Riddell study in respect of these criteria on their work and/or attitudes. For comparative purposes, Riddell's nine criteria have been expanded to fifteen in the survey. These include Riddell's nine, in a few cases broken up into several criteria, and added to this, some criteria derived from the Swedish official development objectives, but not applied by Riddell. The criteria used in the survey are as follows:

Table 6. Criteria applied in the survey

Criteria'
1. Focus on the poor
2. Focus on the poorest
3. Stimulate income and employment
4. Participation by the beneficiaries in the design of projects
5. Build capacity in local partner organisations
6. Make projects financially sustainable
7. Have cost-effective approaches in work
8. Have a gender focus
9. Build political and economic independence in host country
10. Undertake environmental assessment of projects/activities
11. Stimulate innovation
12. Make projects/activities such that they can be replicated by others
13. Have a focus on democracy and human rights
14. Undertake an appraisal of projects before they begin
15. Undertake impact evaluations

¹⁵ The number of criteria is larger than nine as Riddell has lumped some together.

The chapter also discusses to what extent fifteen selected NGOs have incorporated Riddell's criteria in their policy related documents.

It should be stressed that the purpose of this section is not to use the perceptions and attitudes of the surveyed NGOs to validate or dispute the accuracy of the findings of the Riddell study, as implied in Riddell's comments to the draft report. Obviously, attitudes cannot be used in such a fashion. Instead, the purpose is to get a grip of the perceived relevance of the findings by the NGOs (which might be considered a determinant for possible change in conception and operational behaviour), and to what extent the NGOs see any actual change process in the direction suggested by Riddell since the study was undertaken, (i.e. improving on the conditions identified as problems). The purpose is also to assess the perceived impact of the Riddell study on such a change process by the NGOs which are aware of the Proxy evaluation on the key parameters used by Riddell et al. We believe such an analysis is crucial, especially against the background of the methodological issues raised in the previous chapter.

In the comments by Roger Riddell to the draft report, he has claimed that the quotations used in the survey are not an accurate representation of the report, but biased. Obviously, selected sentences can never be a full description of a report of many pages. However, the selected sentences were carefully selected to represent what we perceive as the gist of the findings. Furthermore, the statements obviously express weaknesses found by the Proxy study with the implicit understanding that improvements in these aspects would make 'better' development aid. It is such a context of less interest of some NGOs already perform well.

4.2 Poverty focus

The analysis of the Proxy evaluation

Riddell *et al* note that the core principle underlying all Swedish official development assistance is that it should improve the standards of living of the poor. Poverty focus is also the key criteria used by Riddell assessing the NGO projects, both directly and indirectly through criteria closely related to poverty. The approach in the study is to assess 1) to what extent the NGOs work with the poor and the poorest, and 2) to what extent their projects make a sustainable impact on this poverty.

The Riddell study concluded from its four country case studies that the Swedish NGO projects often did not reach the poorest and not even necessarily the very poor. The study claimed that this was to some extent due to the fact that the NGOs did not conceptualise what poverty is, nor what its causes are, and rather assumed to be working with the poor. The study found that the projects by and large are service delivery, which in Riddell's view, have little to do with poverty alleviation. It concluded that in all the four case countries there was little evidence to suggest that the work of the Swedish NGOs has made much impact on poverty. The poverty focus of the Swedish NGOs, or rather the lack thereof, is one of the Riddell report's most profound criticisms. The report claims to shatter the aura surrounding the NGOs which derives from their claim of being particularly good at reaching the poor.

The NGOs' views

In the survey three poverty related questions derived from the Riddell report were included. These asked the NGOs whether they agreed or disagreed (concerning themselves), and, if they agreed, whether there was any change in the situation as compared to the time of the study (1994). The results of the survey in response to these questions are given below.

Table 7. Survey results: the NGOs' views on poverty

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
1. NGO projects do not often reach the poorest, and not even necessarily the very poor	54	46	69	23	8
2. There is little evidence to suggest that the work of Swedish NGOs has had much of an impact on poverty	42	58	80	20	–
3. Many Swedish NGOs do not begin from conceptualisation of poverty, of what it is, what causes it and how to address it	44	56	30	70	–

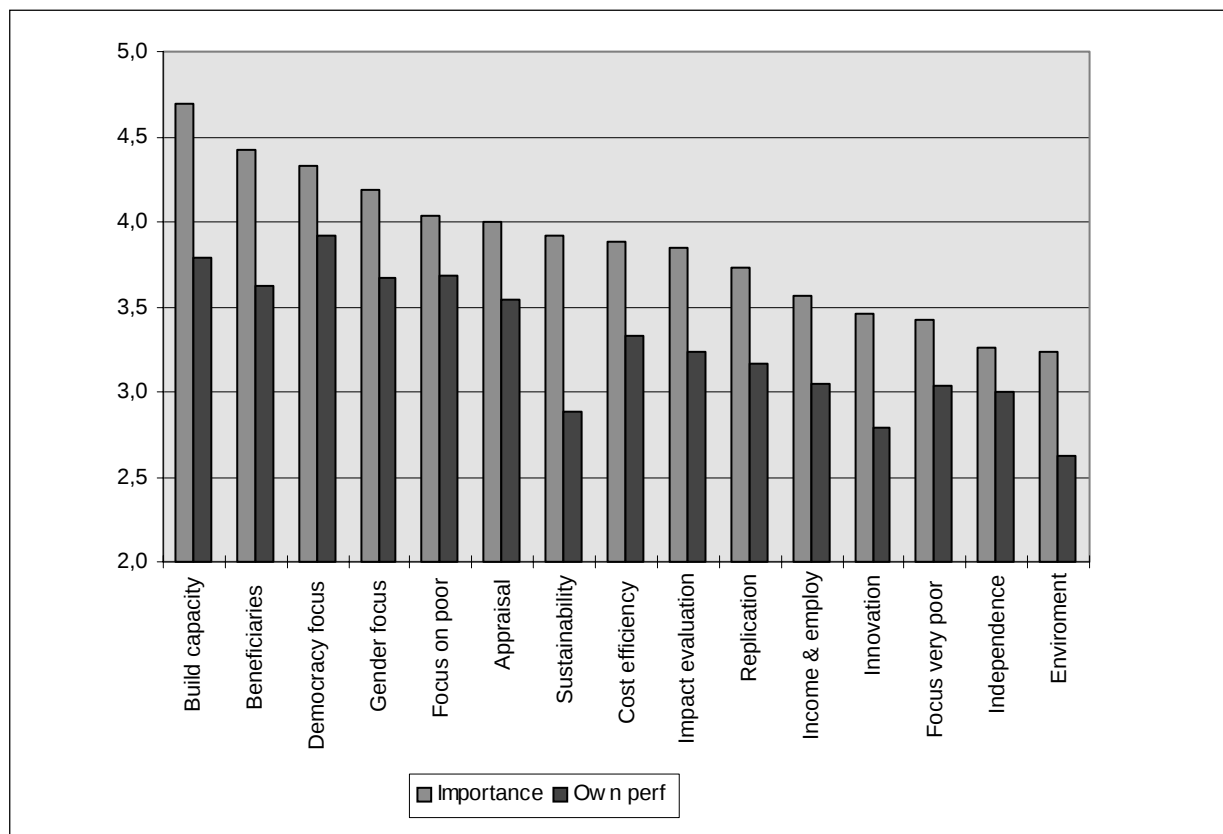
As noted above, a majority of the NGOs agreed with the Proxy evaluation that their projects often don't reach the poorest or the very poor and most of them don't think that there has been any change in this respect since 1994. The interpretation of the aggregates should be treated with care. Some of the respondent NGOs disagree strongly with Riddell, claiming that they indeed reach the very poorest, for example, defined as specific target groups such as the disabled, orphans, children in need, poor women, people with leprosy, and other such groups.

A majority disagree that the NGO work has little impact on poverty. The NGOs in the survey often refer to own evaluations which show an impact on poverty if interpreted as the specific group the NGO is working with and not in general terms. The majority of the NGOs also disagree that they do not conceptualise poverty. Such analysis, they argue, is often based on needs and conditions of the specific target groups of the NGOs. Such knowledge has a foundation sometimes decades of work with the same target group in co-operation with their partner organisations.

Overall, as noted in the table above, the response from the NGOs on the poverty related questions are mixed. The quite critical judgements of the Proxy evaluation of what might be considered as the essentials of development assistance were supported by more than 40 percent of the responding NGOs. This must be considered as an indication that the study has made a valid point which a substantial number of NGOs find valid.

The NGOs were asked to rank the importance of a poverty focus together with fourteen other criteria for their work in the survey. The result shows in aggregate that poverty focus is regarded as important but not the most important criteria for the NGOs' work. Of fifteen criteria applied in the survey, *poverty focus* ranked as the fifth most important after criteria such as *building local capacity*, *participation by the beneficiaries in the design of projects*, *gender focus* and a *focus on democracy and human rights*. Having a *focus on the poorest* ranked amongst the lowest of all the fifteen criteria. These results are reflected in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2. Survey results: NGOs' assessment of the importance of development criteria and their own performance



Treatment in policy documents

In the analysis of the policy documents of the fifteen selected NGOs, it can further be concluded that reaching the poorest is not a general goal of the Swedish NGOs. Only two of the fifteen organisations studied have “reaching one of the poorest groups in society” as a goal. However, a majority are undertaking a conceptualisation of poverty and some kind of socio-economic analysis of the societies that they are working in to understand the social and economic processes that create poverty. These analyses look not only to the economic conditions of poverty, but also to equality, economic and political oppression as well as other structures that create poverty. From the cases we conclude that Riddell’s statement that the Swedish NGOs do not conceptualise poverty and what causes it, seems not valid for this particular segment of the NGOs. Whether this is a change since 1994 cannot be judged from the studied documents. However, it is likely that there has not been a great change since the policy formulation process of the NGOs has been on-going for a number of years.

Why are the NGOs not aiming at the poorest?

One reason why the NGOs do not reach the poorest, as claimed by Riddell, is that many of them do not see this as their objective. These results might be surprising (as they were to the Riddell team) given the strong emphasis on poverty in Swedish aid. However, the belief that the Swedish NGOs are strong in reaching the poorest is a misconception. A very large number of Swedish NGOs have specific mandates in which a direct poverty focus does not necessarily rank very high. Such mandates are often related to the NGOs’ broader role in Sweden as a popular movement. For example, trade union linked NGOs have as their mission to *foster independent trade*

union development based on respect for human rights, democracy and equal rights; political youth movements have as their overall mission to *foster democratic political organisation amongst youth in developing countries*; church related NGOs generally have a poverty focus, but the overriding mission might be objectives such as *develop man on an evangelical base*, while organisations focusing on the disabled have as a prime objective to *improve the living conditions amongst the disabled in developing countries*. For NGOs specialised in overseas development, their mission might be expressed as *saving the rain forests* or *saving the gains of the Nicaraguan revolution*; as a broader humanitarian objective such as *reduce the risk for armed conflict*; or as a more narrow technical, functional objective such as *support the development of democracy in Tanzania through Folk Development Colleges* and so on. The target group definitions for such organisations often have little to do with poverty status: people organised into trade unions, co-operatives or political youth movements are rarely the poor. There might be a correlation between disability and poverty, but the less poor are not excluded from such programmes. This is not news to Sida. To quote a Sida staff member:

If you take the trade unions, they are usually male, urban and belonging to the formal labour force. In many developing countries such a group belong to the better off. However, if you excluded this target group, many of the Swedish NGOs would not be eligible for support. ...

Many Swedish NGOs are created and built around such missions and, in line with keeping their identity, these missions are the overriding principle of their work, rather than the more conventional objectives of official development assistance. Obviously, the government also kept this in mind in the NGO support, stressing that the projects and activities should be the NGOs' own. It can be argued that the Proxy evaluation missed these points and thus applied to some extent a stereotype conception of the NGOs. This, in its turn questions the validity of its findings and their relevance for (many) NGOs.

A second reason for the lower importance attached to assisting the poorest is a recognition that this group is extremely difficult to reach through development assistance. These groups are often without any form of assets, and due to poverty often unable to participate in projects, including activities building on participative techniques. There is a well known conflict between assisting the very poorest and financial sustainability of the development work. In the words of some of the NGOs interviewed:

The soup kitchen for the destitute in Sweden in the last century was not a sustainable development effort, but in our efforts to help the poorest, we are asked to also be sustainable...

Our aim is not to work with the poorest. An aid organisation should only work with the category of people it can efficiently help with available means. For us, the poorest is not such a category.

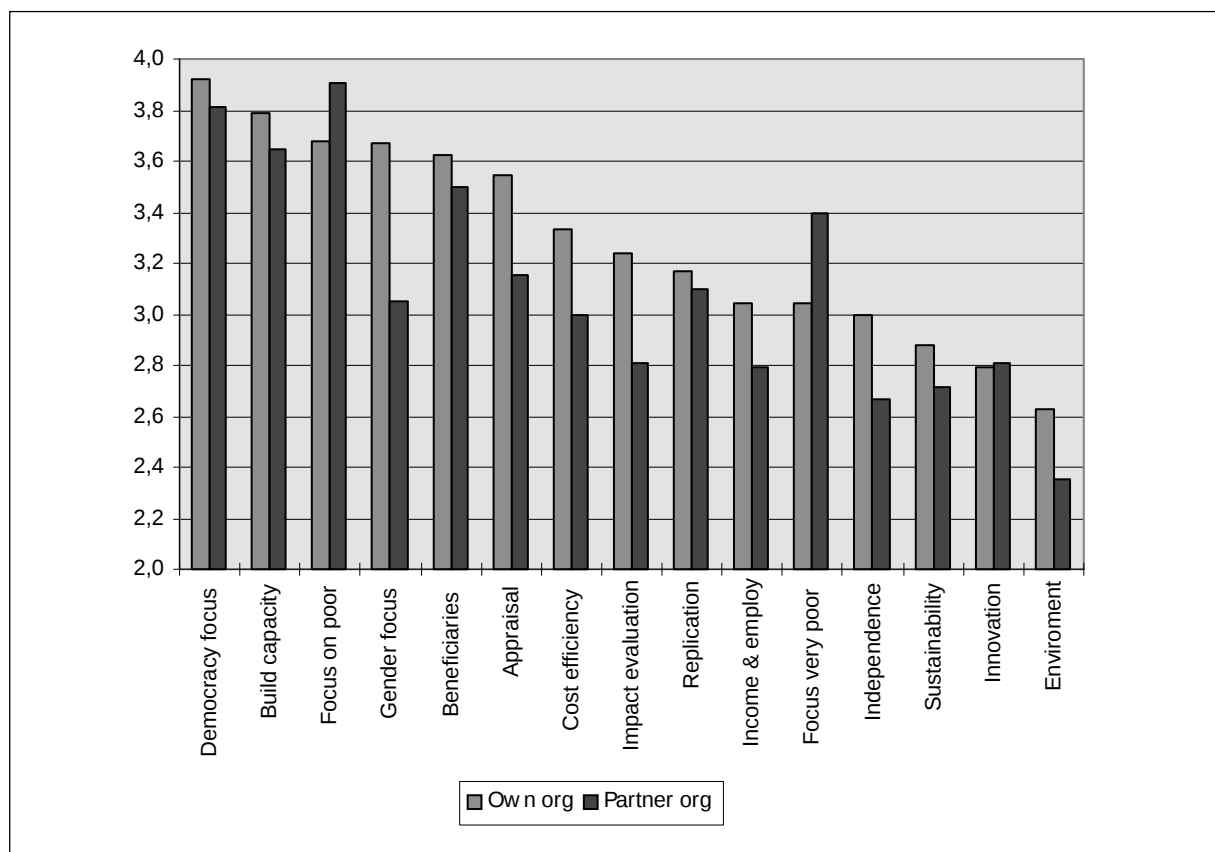
A third explanation for the discrepancy might be the operational definition of poverty, reflected in the following quotations from the interviews:

We don't intend to reach the poorest in that society. Our aim is to work in poorer areas.

We don't interpret the poverty criteria the same way as Riddell did. We don't focus on the poorest – but our work on democracy at grass roots level will lead to demands of justice and equality, eventually benefiting the poor.

It is noteworthy in this context that the NGOs in the survey rate the performance of their local counterpart organisations better than how they rate themselves in reaching the poor, and especially the poorest. For all the other 14 criteria in the survey, the Swedish NGOs rate themselves better in performance than their local counterparts (except in stimulating innovation) as indicated in figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Survey results: NGOs' assessment of own and partner performance



NGOs in developing countries are more likely to be established to 'help the poor' (and the poorest) as their prime mission. The latter might be reflecting the aid market on which most of these NGOs are dependent. Funds for development assistance from the North channelled via local NGOs are often provided for helping the poor, and donors have stringent criteria for how this should be accomplished. The case study of India conducted in the study confirms this view. The Indian NGOs interviewed in the study claim to be strongly focusing on poverty. This, of course, reflects the quite different political and social set up of India, where poverty alleviation in the spirit of Gandhi is national policy dominating the NGO sector. Also the Indian government relies on the NGOs to reach the poorest in society.

Are the NGOs at odds with Swedish overall development objectives?

Is there a conflict between the overall Swedish official development objectives and the actual work and priorities of the Swedish NGOs as Riddell implicitly argues? In our view, there is no real conflict. Poverty alleviation is currently interpreted quite broadly in the Swedish aid system. *Raising the living standards of the poor* does not necessarily mean carrying out projects which directly target the poor or indeed the poorest. Increasingly there is a recognition that poverty reduction most effectively is achieved by improving the overall development environment, from strengthening the macro economic performance of a country, making institutions more effective, building human capital, improving the functioning of the market, promoting democratic governance, etc. Indeed, a considerable share of the funds distributed through Sida have at best an indirect effect on poverty, and aid directly aimed at the *very poor* is a minuscule percent of this aid. Assisting the poor, and even the

poorest, should not be interpreted as only activities directly aimed at the poorest in line with a traditional rural development orientation. Within such a framework for development, there is no reason why the NGO support should be different from other development assistance. Furthermore, the Swedish NGOs' agenda for promoting the development of civil society, there might be even less argument for a direct poverty orientation.

4.3 Income generation, employment and poverty

The analysis in the Proxy report

Riddell *et al* argue that one reason for the limited impact on poverty by the Swedish NGO projects is that they only address to a limited degree what in the team's view is the main reason for poverty: low income and lack of employment. Instead, the focus of the projects is mainly service delivery and training which, in Riddell's words, *only very indirectly attempt to address poverty*. One of the reason for this state of affairs is that

*...the staff and experiences of Swedish NGOs do not equip them well, nor predispose them, to focus on analytical issues related to income and employment generation, or markets and market analysis.*¹⁶

The NGOs' views

This analysis was put forward to the NGOs in the survey in which they were asked to agree or disagree, and if they agreed, to determine whether the situation had changed for the better or worse since 1994. The results are presented below:

Table 8. Survey results: NGOs' views on income and employment generation

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
4. Service delivery programmes are not likely to make much difference to poverty	46	54	56	44	-
5. The staff and experience of Swedish NGOs do not equip them well to focus on analytical issues related to income and employment generation, markets and market analysis	59	41	46	55	-
6. Swedish NGO supported projects are not very successful in promoting viable income generating projects	68	32	50	50	-

As can be derived from the table, the majority of the NGOs disagree with Riddell's position that service delivery and training do not make much of a difference to poverty. The arguments put forward by the NGOs are, for instance:

¹⁶ Riddell et al 1995, page 77

Human capital formation is essential for reduction of poverty and is a foundation for growth in the future.

In the long run, service delivery is essential for poverty reduction.

Our educational programmes and vocational training certainly helps people to get employment.

The linkage between service delivery and poverty is complex. Furthermore, access to basic social services such as health and education are explicit Swedish development assistance objectives as noted in chapter 3. In fact, the Swedish perception of poverty seems to have more to do with such aspects than income. From this perspective, the Swedish NGOs seem well attuned to the overall Swedish policy.

While a majority of the NGOs dispute Riddell's view of the limited linkage between service delivery, training and poverty reduction, there is a clear majority which agree that the staff of the Swedish NGOs are not well equipped for more economic oriented projects, and an even larger majority which agree with the study that income generating projects are not a strength of the Swedish NGOs. This has to a large extent to do with the orientation of Swedish NGO projects. The sector distribution of the NGO projects in the four country cases in the Riddell study shows that the share of income and employment generating projects of the total Swedish NGO support is very low, accounting for less than 4 percent of the total, while most of the Sida supported NGO projects are in the education and health sectors. The study also noted that health and education accounted for over 50 percent of the total NGO window support in 1994, while these sectors accounted for less than 20 percent of Sida's total support. Riddell is critical about this, and even attributes the NGOs' high share of service delivery programmes to a fear of addressing the structural causes of poverty, and to a certain degree of opportunism:

Service delivery programmes are not likely to make much of a difference, although they are easier to implement, less politically charged, and are more visible in the field in the shape of schools, water systems and health centres. They are also easier to monitor: bureaucratically they are more attractive projects to support, but developmentally their potential contribution is likely to be far more limited than projects which address structural causes of poverty, for example in political and economic power systems.¹⁷

A less charged explanation for the sector distribution might be that NGOs tend to have grown out of humanitarian causes, and service delivery is often the natural response to such causes. As indicated above, there is generally also a high demand for health and educational services by the poor, possibly reflecting the NGOs' responsiveness to such grass roots demands. In situations of conflict and political turmoil, restoring or maintaining some basic health and educational services is a fundamental need. Nevertheless, the Swedish NGOs recognise a weakness in their capacity to undertake direct income and employment generating projects. Some of the NGO comments on the statement that the Swedish staff lack the right skills were:

We are getting better in this respect via our sister organisations in developing countries.

We are building this competence in our staff now and we are giving income generation priority.

Income generating projects are difficult and we have been too idealistic in our approach, but we are learning.

¹⁷ Riddell et al 1995, page 79

While income and employment generation might be placed higher on the agenda by the NGOs, this does not obscure the fact that the NGOs by and large have other priorities. The NGOs were asked to rank the criterion, *stimulate income and employment*, amongst fifteen objectives as mentioned earlier. As shown in figure 2 above, this criterion is given (relative to other) rather low priority and ranked amongst the five lowest. The NGOs which responded to the survey also acknowledged that their performance is less good as compared to most of the other criteria, and they rated their counterpart organisations as (relatively) low as well. We conclude that the Riddell study is critical of the Swedish NGOs for their poverty orientation, and ability to address income and employment generation issues. However, the relevance of this critique and the implicit recommendations can be questioned. Riddell has nothing to say whether a shift towards more income and employment generating activities is within the comparative advantages of the NGOs with their past history, or whether the effectiveness of NGO support in fact is enhanced by focusing on what the NGOs are good in delivering. As noted by a NGO commenting on the draft report, there is a real risk that poorly founded findings might lead to normative actions by Sida, potentially forcing counterproductive changes.

In the survey the NGOs do not credit the Riddell study with a particular impact in placing income and employment generation higher on the agenda. Thus *income and employment* is given a lower rating in terms of impact by the Riddell report than all other criteria. The change that is taking place is rather a longer term process of shifting attention and overall learning in development which was taking place independent of the Riddell study. It is noteworthy that on the question of how useful support from Sida or the framework organisations would be to develop the NGOs' capacity for a particular criterion, *income and employment generation* is considered one of the most important areas. This indicates an area in which Sida and/or the framework organisations could provide technical assistance to the NGOs. To a large extent, such assistance could be transfer of know-how in between the NGOs, as some organisations have specialised in this field and gained some valuable know-how. Perhaps most important in this context is that NGOs which have attempted income and employment generation share their (often negative) learning with those that are in the process of moving into this field.

4.4 Participation by the beneficiaries

The analysis of the Proxy evaluation

Riddell *et al* are using partnership (local organisation participation) and participation by the direct beneficiaries as one of the nine criteria for development impact. Participation, the study argues, is essential to increase the sustainability of projects. This, in its turn, requires participation in the design of activities to create local ownership. The study thus reflects a broad international trend in the aid community and also Swedish development thinking as to what are the key ingredients for effective sustainable development assistance. While not an explicit official objective of the Swedish development assistance, participation and ownership are important criteria in Sida's current thinking.

Riddell *et al*'s analysis of the Swedish NGO system based on the four country case studies claims that the projects show limited participation by the stakeholders. Thus:

There was little or no evidence of community-based planning and a prioritising of needs preceding project conception and design... the pre-project participation in church or mission implemented projects was particularly weak... The tendency of Swedish funds to lead to a centralisation of authority, either at headquarters or, more narrowly, in the power of one or two individuals... is the very opposite of participation.¹⁸

The study claimed there was far too little evidence to show that the NGOs attempted to address participation seriously. It believed that the Swedish NGOs could do much in this regard. The study also claimed that the participative aspect was reduced as some of the Swedish NGOs are providing packages which they implement because that is what they know and are good at doing.

Providing a package, especially one which is home-grown in Sweden, runs the risk that the project has not grown out of priorities as defined by the local stakeholders.

The NGOs' views

The NGOs in the survey were asked to comment on some of the study's statements regarding participative development. The results are given below:

Table 9. Survey results: NGOs' views on participative development

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
20. There has been limited participation by the beneficiaries in the conception, design and planning stage of NGO projects	46	54	25	75	-
21. The limited use of participative design by Swedish NGOs means that there is a higher risk that the projects will not respond to the beneficiaries priorities	48	52	33	67	-

The views are fairly commonly mixed between agreeing and disagreeing, but with a slight majority of disagreement. This result might be a reflection of the diversity of the Swedish NGOs. While there are NGOs which comply with Riddell's views and see a need for much improvement, there are others which strongly object to the statements. They point to the fact that people's participation is their key objective and much of the *raison d'être* for their work. It is noteworthy that a clear majority of the NGOs believe that participation is better now than when the evaluation was undertaken. In this respect, the NGOs reflect a broader trend in development assistance. Participation is increasingly becoming a key concept.

Participation by the beneficiaries in design was one of the criteria for development in the survey. It was given the second highest ranking of all 15 applied criteria for the NGOs' development work. The NGOs also ranked their own performance in this respect relatively high.

¹⁸ Riddell et al 1995, page 80-81

Can the change in priorities and performance in participation by the beneficiaries be attributed to any extent to the Riddell report? Few of the NGOs claim that the Riddell study contributed to the change. The change in taking beneficiary participation into account, and even making it a major objective was a reflection and strengthening of an on-going process with inputs from many sources.

Participation of the stakeholders is addressed as an important issue in all but one of the studied documents of the NGOs. Ten of the fifteen organisations have a full discussion of the issue of stakeholder participation in planning, and eleven of them discuss participation in implementation at length. The organisation which does not have stakeholder participation in the studied documents is a political framework organisation.

Discussing *the package approach* by some NGOs the Riddell report points to a basic dilemma in development aid which is not exclusive to NGO support: the balance between development assistance on the beneficiaries terms, on one hand, and development pursuing a Northern idea on the other. It can be argued that Western development aid overall is founded in such Western concepts as the functions and institutions of an open market economy, the institution of democracy, and the promotion of Western principles for health care and farmer co-operatives. Some of this indeed is in the form of packages. As has been discussed earlier, many of the Swedish NGOs have clear and very specific missions for their work, which tend to be home-grown, as Riddell pointed out. Trade union organisations are pursuing trade union development in developing countries along the same principles as at home; church mission related NGOs have to a greater or lesser extent a Christian concept behind their aid even in countries where the majority of the population are members of other faiths, a factor pointed out in the Indian field work in this study; professional organisations with teachers and medical practitioners pursuing aid apply their Swedish or Western professional model in teaching, health care, etc. to their overseas work. Coming with a *package* is thus an underlying principle behind much aid and sanctioned in the official Swedish aid policy. It might even be argued that turning the aid around to become entirely driven by explicit needs and priorities by the beneficiaries would be contradictory to the whole philosophy of development assistance. Besides, such an approach might perhaps lose the *comparative advantage* of the North and the NGOs in delivering it. Development assistance in general and NGO assistance in particular has as an overriding objective to stimulate change in the recipient countries. The model for this change is often our model, our experience, our organisational set-up and our beliefs. Whether this is right or wrong is a larger question not discussed here. It could be argued that participation in this context is to make sure that the beneficiaries agree with these principles, not just for short-term benefits delivered by a project, but for long term sustainability of the change.

The issue of supply versus demand in development assistance is not well explored. *Participation* and *ownership* implies a strong supply driven approach. In a broader learning context, the NGO experience both in providing *packages* and by doing small scale projects in close co-operation with local organisations appears to have generic lessons for aid in general.

In the interviews, the NGOs point at many problems of participation as a result of how local NGOs might function:

All local organisations are not good – it is difficult to find local organisations that live up to Swedish demands of democratic leadership and open membership. Many organisations are formed just to attract international donors and a person could easily proclaim himself to be a local leader. If he manages to get money – which he probably will – he has thereby gained legitimacy as a local leader.

4.5 Capacity building of local organisations

The analysis of the Proxy evaluation

Riddell does not use the concept of ownership in local organisations and local capacity building directly in the nine development criteria. However, this is indirectly expressed in one of the study's criteria: *evidence from projects/programmes assessed of the impact of Swedish technical personnel: their importance, their training of people, the potential for their replacement and lessons learnt*. Local capacity building is also related to another of the nine criteria: organisational sustainability.

The Evaluation report argues the importance of promoting sustainable organisations, for example local organisations based on membership which have legitimacy and the ability to mobilise their own resources. In terms of capacity building the study makes less generalised statements than for many other aspects. It points to risks, but also to good principles of the Swedish NGOs. Examples of such risks are that Swedish aid contributes to a paternalistic culture by focusing on the leader in an organisation, or through its funding system creating a paternalistic link with the North for an organisation rather than fostering local ownership. Stressing and building membership organisations is considered some of the good models.

The Proxy evaluation made some statements of the role and function of Swedish personnel in the field based on an admittedly limited sample. It argued that, while the quality of their work and commitment was indisputable, the Swedish staff possessed only in a very few instances skills that the local people did not have. Riddell argued that the local organisations accepted Swedish field staff because to them it was basically free labour. In the view of the study, this risked that the local organisation would not assign a counterpart to the Swedish staff member with the result that there is no time for building capacity in the organisation. In a worst case scenario referred to in the case material, volunteers can obstruct capacity building because they control and manage all the relationships between the organisation and the Swedish NGO, thus preventing organisational learning.

The NGOs' views

In the survey the NGOs were asked to respond to some of the statements in the Riddell report concerning capacity building and the role of Swedish volunteer personnel. The results are given below:

Table 10. Survey results: The NGOs' view on capacity building

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
7. It is uncommon that Swedish field personnel possess and provide skills that the local people do not have	40	60	71	29	-
8. There is a risk that field workers end up doing the jobs themselves, not building capacity in the local organisation, and sometimes even obstructing capacity building	68	32	8	92	-

It should be noted that many NGOs do not have field staff of their own, and therefore could not answer these questions. However, amongst those with field staff, the majority of the NGOs disagree that the Swedish field personnel have no skills which are not already available amongst local staff. Some of the NGOs argue that skills should be seen in a broad context, for example in terms of 'ethnic neutrality' which gives them an opportunity to work in conflict areas.

On the other hand, there is a strong majority which agree with the view that the field workers end up doing the implementation themselves, and thus not building local capacity. It is noteworthy in this context that almost all the NGOs argue that the situation in this respect is better than it was in 1994. In response to this question some of the views of the NGOs are:

The awareness of these risks has increased considerably.

We are more careful in recruiting overseas staff and do it now only on the expressed demand of the local organisation.

we are reducing the level of field staff and volunteers which decreases the risk of obstructing capacity building.

We use only local personnel these days.

We are making more defined job descriptions for the field personnel in which capacity building is stressed.

Field personnel have become more sensitive to local demands over time and they have started to listen more carefully.

The only way to spread democratic ideals is through volunteers, but the new rules makes volunteers almost impossible.

The new rules for volunteers – a kind of a “drivers licence” – are good.

The NGOs were asked to rank *building capacity in local partner organisations* as a criterion for their development work in the survey. This criterion was given the highest ranking of the fifteen applied criteria as indicated in figure 2 above. It represents an objective which the Swedish NGOs see themselves as best in doing. This high ranking reflects to a high degree the functions and missions of many Swedish NGOs.

Local capacity building has a long tradition for many of the NGOs. Many of them were involved in this long before the concept became fashion in the aid community, and it is in many ways the *raison d'être* for their work. Thus, church related NGOs have for decades worked with local sister churches; interest group NGOs, such as for the disabled or trade unions, have as their mission to foster local organisations; and specialised NGOs are often directly linked with sister organisations in developing countries. The new Sida guidelines for NGO support also put emphasis on such linkages, and make this a foundation for the NGO support. From the interviews, we believe that the NGOs have a considerable knowledge in capacity building which in many ways is unique in the aid system. It is a know how which is not fully utilised by other organisations such as Sida. This points to a theme running through this study: *cross-organisational learning*. While the Riddell report, and implicitly also the Terms of Reference for this study, focus on how the government/Sida can influence the NGOs towards more effective aid, there is the reverse process: how can the diverse experience and know how of the NGOs influence the official government development assistance and Sida's bilateral co-operation towards more effective aid?

4.6 Sustainability

The analysis of the Proxy evaluation

Sustainability takes a prominent place both in the Terms of Reference for the Proxy evaluation and in the report itself. For example, of the 23 specific questions asked by the T.o.R., 60 percent concern issues of sustainability. This is also one of the nine development criteria used by Riddell *et al*, but several of the other criteria are intrinsically linked to sustainability, e.g. *stakeholder participation* and *capacity building in local organisations*. Riddell *et al* make a distinction between financial, institutional and environmental sustainability. He also discusses threats to sustainability due to conflicts of interest what might be defined as political sustainability. The most common threat to sustainability, however, is dependency on continuous external funding for activities and organisations, i.e. *financial sustainability*. The Proxy evaluation draws the conclusion from its case material that,

...many of the Swedish NGOs and their partners appear to have given little or no thought to financial sustainability at the onset of their projects.

The issue is compounded by the fact that most of the NGO projects are in the form of service delivery in health and education. The Riddell study points out that considerable funds through the NGO window have been used for large scale constructions such as hospitals and schools, which demand recurrent cost financing. However, recurrent financing was given little or no attention at the time of the project implementation, according to the study.

Furthermore, Riddell claims that rather than looking at the market for securing financial sustainability of projects, Swedish NGO supported projects tend to expect government funding for recurrent cost financing. Structural adjustment programmes on-going in many recipient countries implying a declining role for the government and greater reliance on the private sector, have compounded this problem.

The NGOs' views

Some of the Proxy evaluation's statements concerning financial sustainability were put forward to the NGOs in the survey. The results are given below:

Table 11. Survey results: NGOs' views on financial sustainability

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
16. Many of the Swedish NGOs and their partners appear to have given little or no thought to financial sustainability at the start of their projects	31	69	22	78	-
17. Little thought is given (by the Swedish NGOs) of how the maintenance of investments in schools, hospitals etc. shall be sustained and who will provide the maintenance funds	38	62	50	50	-
18. The current volume of Sida funds to NGO projects reduces the interest by the NGOs to make their projects sustainable	4	96	100		-
19. The Swedish NGOs have looked for the host governments to finance the running of the projects	54	46	33	44	22

There is a strong majority which disagree with three of the four statements, and especially the one arguing that Swedish aid flows through the NGOs have made them less interested in the issue of sustainability. Only the finding that NGOs are looking to the state for financing of maintenance costs is accepted by a majority of the NGOs. The arguments by the NGOs disputing Riddell's first three statements are given below. They indicate the increasing concern for sustainability, but also the dilemma of creating sustainability in projects for the poor, or in countries devastated by war:

There is a fundamental dilemma in this - how can programmes and projects for the poorest be made financially sustainable?

We focus on sustainability beyond our support, but often the projects continue as other foreign NGOs step in. Thus, the motivation of local organisations to be self-sustaining is not always there.

It is our main task to keep projects and services going for generations so of course we pay a lot of attention to sustainability.

In a country like Mozambique we need to have a very long perspective of several decades in our support due to the condition of the country. We have to include financing recurrent costs. This is according to our plans, not lack of thought on sustainability.

We and our sister organisations have as a main objective to make these organisations financially independent and sustainable.

Sustainability is not only about how long the project lives, but also about what has been learnt along the way. Many of our projects have been bombed in the wars, in that way they have not been sustained. But the people involved, the individuals, still have the knowledge and the contacts they established during the project.

Our own contribution of 20 percent makes us concerned that projects survive – it is not only Sida money; furthermore our own contribution makes it difficult to finance expensive projects which are difficult to maintain by local resources.

The NGOs also argue that the government should have an obligation to maintain certain basic services even under difficult financial circumstances, and that the NGOs act as advocates for this. The following statements reflect this view:

We do advocacy in trying to change government attitudes toward important social services such as those to children in need, for the disabled, etc.;

We have to take a long term approach, fully aware of the fact that it will take many years before a project is self-going, for example in training activities. In the long run we foresee the state taking over.

The NGOs also recognise that changed economic conditions in many of the recipient countries and the changing role of government, trigger new thinking on sustainability. This leads, for example, to more restrictive investments in buildings. The NGOs tend to operate differently today than in the 1980s when many of the studied projects originated. This has much more to do with changing conditions, than with the findings of the Proxy evaluation.

Making projects financially sustainable was one of the fifteen criteria in the survey. As shown in figure 2 above, it is given one of the highest rankings by the NGOs in terms of importance for their work. At the same time, the NGOs rank themselves very low in performance against this criterion. There is a wider discrepancy between importance and performance for sustainability than for any of the other fourteen criteria, as indicated in figure 3 above. Financial sustainability is an issue that not only NGOs struggle with, but which the donor community at large is concerned with. Studies have shown that financing often is the key factor why institutions, projects and programmes cannot be sustained without external support, while technical competence, etc. plays a much less significant role¹⁹.

Sustainability is viewed somewhat differently by the local partners. As further discussed in the chapter on India, sustainability is seen to be in conflict with poverty alleviation in the sense that the poor *are* dependent on external support, and will continue to be dependent on such support for the foreseeable future. If Swedish funds are not provided, sustainability of services for the poor will be sought from other sources, such as NGOs from other Western countries, the government or private donations. This reflects different perspectives in the North and South: Swedish official aid is based on the notion of temporary support; an investment *to help the poor help themselves* until external aid can be withdrawn. Projects are generally of short duration and there is a strong reluctance to finance costs that are not inherently time bound such as salaries, etc. Development is historically based on the notion that ‘underdevelopment’ can be overcome through an investment (in capital assets, in know-how, technical transfer, etc.) which basically will make further external support unnecessary. While the Swedish NGO community probably has a somewhat different view, given its history, the NGOs are also influenced by, and dependent on, the views dominating the government support.

¹⁹ See for example, Catterson & Lindahl: *The sustainability enigma*, MPI, 1998.

Local NGOs tend to have a different time perspective and possibly also a different philosophical foundation. In many countries they perceive themselves to be part and parcel of a more or less formalised and permanent welfare system. As such, they are much less driven by *phasing in and phasing out* of projects and much more driven by the idea of permanency. Local NGOs often run long-term programmes with shifting and shorter-term financial inputs from external sources. They are pre-occupied with securing support for their long-term involvement, while the external funders might be more driven by shorter-term inputs to shifting projects.

Treatment in policy documents

Sustainability as discussed by the NGO policy documents focuses mainly on institutional rather than financial sustainability. However, in the case that such a discussion takes place, it takes the form of various creative approaches. For example, one NGO stresses that the handover of projects is facilitated by supporting local level districts organisations rather than central institutions, thereby building a membership cadre which will help to make the organisations self-reliant. Another NGO suggests a planned phase out in the project formulation, and an explicit time frame for phase out already at the on-set of the project. A third NGO argues that projects should be formulated with as little external resource as possible, for instance, using low capital intensity, a high degree of local materials and personnel resources.

The issue of financial sustainability is not new to the NGOs and few of them credit the Riddell report as having had an impact on their thinking in this regard. At the same time, the NGOs which work mainly within civil society probably have a better knowledge of mechanisms for enhancing financial sustainability through revenue generation and low-cost solutions than many traditional government schemes now exposed to the new economic realities under structural adjustment. User fees, income generating projects attached to service delivery organisations, local resource mobilisation, use of membership organisations, string budget operations to reduce costs, etc. are common practices and were a reality long before structural adjustment for many NGOs. Also in this field *cross organisational learning* might be of value for the overall effectiveness of Swedish aid.

We conclude that the findings of the Proxy evaluation in terms of sustainability to a large extent are not shared by the NGO community. While considered one of the key factors in development aid, the relevance of the Proxy evaluation's findings to the NGO community therefor appears low. This is likely to determine to what extent the NGOs have been influenced of the study in this respect.

4.7 Gender

The analysis in the Proxy evaluation

The Proxy evaluation claims that the Swedish NGOs have been poor on gender aspects. It further argues that there is a great difference in the rhetoric of the NGOs on gender and the reality of their projects. Thus:

A number of projects examined claim to be gender sensitive because they meet women's needs, for instance in maternal and child health and service provision... This reflects a broader limitation in the ways which Swedish NGOs deal with poverty – namely they respond to its symptoms rather than its causes.²⁰

²⁰ Riddell et al (1995), p. 78.

Riddell's analysis of gender is based on power relationships and the structural social and economic forces which cause discrimination against women. From this perspective, Riddell's perception of the issue of gender is in line with that of the Swedish government which in 1995 made *gender equality* an official development objective. It also became one of the new Sida's four priority areas for action.

The NGOs' views

The NGOs were asked to respond to Riddell's critique on their treatment of gender in the survey. The result showed that a slight majority agreed to the statement cited above (54 percent). Nevertheless, four out of ten believed the situation was better now than in 1994 when the study was conducted. The new official development objective, and seeing gender as a mainstreamed activity rather than a *women in development issue seems to have contributed to this enhanced awareness*.

Gender has high priority amongst the NGOs according to the survey. It was ranked higher than poverty focus. The NGOs also consider their own performance in respect of gender to be good relative to the other development criteria applied. On the other hand, the rating of the performance of their local counterpart organisations is fairly low. The gap between the perception of the Swedish NGOs' own performance and the performance of their partners is wider than for any of the fifteen criteria as indicated in figure 3 above. We see this as a reflection of the attention paid to gender in the Swedish development assistance over several decades. At the same time, Riddell's criticism that the Swedish NGOs deal with symptoms of gender inequality through services tailored for women, rather than addressing the structural causes of inequality, seems valid. To some extent this is a result of the composition of the NGOs' project portfolio with a very high share of service delivery projects. Health services, for example, tend not to address power relationships, at least not in the short term. On the other hand, educational services focusing on girls and women might have a strong in-built mechanism for changing power structures. To cite the Swedish Afghanistan Committee:

We have about 20 percent girls in our school programmes. This might seem little and not very gender sensitive, but in the current political environment of Afghanistan it is revolutionary. It is against the Taliban's policies, but we manage because the local powers are often slightly more liberal.

All of the NGOs' policy documents studied address the issue of equality between men and women. In a few cases it is easy to get the impression that the issue merely is dealt with for the sake of formality, rather than as a real policy matter. In such cases, the treatment is more of *Women in development* through services focusing on women, rather than addressing structural causes of gender inequality. On the other hand, some of the NGOs have made a considerable effort to integrate gender in their policy documents. For example, *Forum Syd* is one such organisation that stresses the gender issues both amongst Swedish NGOs and internationally. Gender is the leading theme in *Forum Syd's* policy work, which is called *the methodology locomotive*, and a model for other issues. This includes *inter alia* gender specific statistics.

When the NGOs were asked whether the Riddell report has influenced their work in respect of gender, the survey indicates a very marginal impact. It is noteworthy that the influence of the Riddell study on gender is ranked amongst the lowest of the fifteen applied development criteria. The NGOs also perceive support from Sida and/or framework organisations to enhance their capacity in this respect to be of relatively lesser importance. Our conclusion is that gender aspects are well integrated in the perception of the Swedish NGOs and that the Proxy evaluation had little to add in this respect.

4.8 Environmental assessment

The analysis in the Proxy evaluation

Development based on a sustainable environment is one of the Swedish government's official development objectives since 1988. It is also one of the nine criteria applied by Riddell in the assessment of the development impact of the Swedish NGOs. The conclusion by the Proxy evaluation on how well the Swedish NGOs perform in respect of this criteria based on the case material was that:

A minority of the projects incorporated environmental concerns into their operations, while a small number of other projects have positive environmental impacts. What was particularly worrying was that a not insignificant number of projects were found to be having negative effects on the environment in large measure because the project promoters were unaware of, and in some cases had not addressed the issue of environmental impact.²¹

However, Riddell also noted that on the whole environmental considerations were not really relevant for a large number of the projects due to their limited scale. If the projects nevertheless were scaled up and integrated into the socio-economic environment, such negative impact could be considerable.

The NGOs' views

The survey asked the NGOs to respond to Riddell's statement concerning environment and also to rank environmental concerns with the other development criteria. The result was that an equal number of NGOs agreed as disagreed with Riddell's statement that *few of the NGO projects incorporate environmental concerns in the design and/or environment is treated extremely superficially*.

Undertaking environmental assessments of projects and activities is given the lowest ranking amongst the fifteen development criteria used in the survey as well as the lowest ranking in terms of the NGOs' performance. We have no clear answer why environmental aspects feature so low (in relative terms) amongst the Swedish NGOs in spite of the prominence given to environment in the overall Swedish development objectives. We can only assume, as Riddell suggests, that the potential environmental impact, positive or negative, is so limited that it does not warrant any major concern. At the same time, generalisations are dangerous when dealing with such diversity as the Swedish NGOs. There are a considerable number of organisations which have environmental protection as their mission and rank environment as their first priority.

The issue of environment surfaces in the studied policy documents of the NGOs only to a small extent. Eight of the fifteen NGOs studied have nothing or very marginal treatment of environment, while only three of the organisations can be said to have dealt with environmental issues to any extent. In some of these cases, environment is merely discussed, but no reference is made to the actions of the NGO. As noted above, we assume that the marginal treatment in the policy documents by the NGOs reflects largely the orientation of the work of the NGOs: none of them are focused on the environment, and most of them have services as the key activity. Another aspect of the marginal treatment of environment is that this seems not to be considered as a core issue for the target group of the NGOs. There is a certain degree of coherence between the NGOs and many representatives of developing countries: environment is an agenda mainly driven by the donors, reflecting their priorities, rather than those of the third world. Once again, we stress that this does not represent the whole spectrum of NGOs.

²¹ Riddell et al 1995, page 91

4.9 Innovation and replication

The analysis in the Proxy evaluation

One of the nine development criteria against which the Swedish NGO projects were measured in terms of development impact was *the extent to which the interventions funded have been innovative, have exhibited flexible and adaptable characteristics, and the extent to which they have been, or have the potential to be, replicable elsewhere.*²² As noted in chapter 3, this criterion cannot be considered in the same category as criteria derived from broader official development objectives. It is rather a technical feature of the assistance: if projects fulfil such characteristics, they are assumed to result in more effective aid by stimulating change (innovation), by better responding to local circumstances (flexibility) and by having leverage on other initiatives for development (replication). If the projects don't, and yet have an impact on poverty, gender equality, environment etc., it does not reduce their development impact.

In terms of innovation amongst the studied projects, Riddell found a mixed result: some projects were innovative, some were not. The degree of innovation seems to be largely dependent on the country studied. Thus, the projects in India were regarded as innovative overall whilst those in Kenya and Zimbabwe were not. The low degree of innovation in the NGO projects was explained by the Proxy evaluation that innovation generally requires more profound work, including re-research, than what is taking place in most projects. The study argued in this context that the Swedish NGOs had a *weak institutional commitment to the idea of research*, hence the low degree of innovation.

The study found that whatever innovation had been created under the projects, it was generally not replicated and/ or scaled up. This, in turn, the study assigned to

...the low profile of Swedish NGOs and their rather poorly developed links with other NGOs, Sida and the governments in the countries where they are working

Furthermore, it also reflected a certain institutional culture, according to the Proxy evaluation, namely that Swedish NGOs,

...are more interested in making the ideas work within their own projects than they are in scaling those ideas up to others.

This was further reinforced by the fact that the projects are mainly in the form of *tangibles rather than ideas*.

The NGOs' views

In the survey, Riddell's statements concerning innovation and replication were tested on the NGOs. The results are given below:

²² Riddell et al 1995 page 45

Table 12. Survey results: NGOs' views on innovation and replication

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
12. There has been limited replication of successful and innovative NGO projects	50	50	84	8	8
13. Limited replication is due to low profile of Swedish NGOs and/or their poorly developed linked with other NGOs, Sida and government in the respective country	38	62	50	50	
14. There is an institutional culture in Swedish NGOs that they are more interested in making their ideas work within their own projects than they are in scaling those ideas up to others	48	52	56	44	
15. The absence of innovation in Swedish NGOs may reflect a weak institutional commitment to the idea of research		52	48	71	29

The table above shows a balance between those agreeing to Riddell's statements and those disagreeing. Given the provocative tone of the statements, we tend to believe that Riddell has made an observation which can be generalised to the NGO community as such. The Riddell observations concern the dissemination of innovation rather than innovation itself, i.e. the process by which successful projects are replicated and scaled up. Such replication can be of two kinds: on the one hand, within the framework of the specific NGO, for example in other projects, in sister organisations etc.; and on the other, into national programmes, projects by other organisations, etc. Riddell's comments concern the latter replication.

There are clear institutional constraints to replication in the NGO sector, not discussed by Riddell. First, the resource constraints identified by most of the NGOs necessitate other financial arrangements, for example government funds, domestic resources or other donors, if projects and activities are to be scaled up. Such resource mobilisation is a problem in itself. Second, NGOs operate under market conditions, not least by having to prove to a home constituency what they are doing abroad. This requires a certain identity with, if not ownership of projects and activities. From such a perspective, it is more rational for an NGO to undertake a new (limited) project with a clear profile, than to spend resources on making others copy and scale up what the NGO has been involved in. Third, there is often a misconception of the ownership of NGO projects: 'Swedish NGO projects' are often multi-donor funded local initiatives and the issue of scaling up and replication is not in the hands of the Swedish NGO, but in those of their local partners.

This points to a potential role for Sida. Sida has the resources and the leverage to scale up successful innovations to larger investments or programmes. Furthermore, Sida, at least in its programme countries, is in a dialogue with the government and can influence a government to take up a small scale innovation by an NGO to make it into a larger programme of even national policy. It is unclear to what extent Sida plays this role, but we believe it is more of an exception than a rule. One reason for this is the organisational responsibility within Sida. Thus, the country programmes

and sector work are carried out by different entities than the one handling the NGO window. There is in general limited sharing of experiences between these parts of the organisation, which Riddell also commented upon. Nevertheless, there are examples of successful efforts of making NGO innovations into a national programme. An example is provided by a programme for the disabled in Gaza/West Bank in which a Swedish NGO has stimulated the co-ordination of a number of fragmented and local NGO initiatives into the development of a national programme for rehabilitation. It links a large number of local NGOs to the relevant ministries in a system where the latter buy services from the former under a joint policy framework. In Bangladesh the NGOs involvement in micro credits have *de facto* established national policy and a nation-wide programme, also involving public sector suppliers.

4.10 Democracy & human rights

The analysis in the Proxy evaluation

One of the objectives for the Swedish official development assistance is *promotion of a democratic development*. It is an objective established in 1978 by the Swedish parliament, implying broad people's participation at all levels of society. Riddell also used this objective as one of the nine criteria in the analysis of development impact by the NGOs. However, in the main report no assessment is made of how well the NGOs perform regarding this criteria. This is surprising in view of the fact that Swedish NGO support intrinsically is linked to democracy issues and popular participation in decision making. A large number of Swedish NGOs have the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights as their main objective. Swedish NGOs are with few exceptions working towards strengthening civil society in their countries through various sister organisation arrangements. These, in turn, are intrinsically linked to democracy, at least in the form it has evolved in Sweden.

Riddell's treatment of democracy in the NGO projects is a weakness in our view, possibly reflecting the bias which is shown in what is implied by the report's title. The NGOs are not just instruments for official development assistance policy, but have a unique role in the promotion of civil society both at home and abroad, and exploit the synergy that might evolve from such promotion. A different interpretation of the scope for the study would have been to emphasise this aspect much more, rather than treating democracy and human rights as one of many development criteria.

The NGOs' views

The NGO survey conducted in this study asked the NGOs to rank the criterion, *focus on democracy and human rights*, as a part of the fifteen development criteria in terms of how important this is for the NGOs' work. Democracy and human rights is ranked as the third most important aspect of the NGO's work after *building capacity in local counterpart organisation* and *participation by the beneficiaries* (The latter two criteria are of course intrinsically linked to democracy built on popular movements). *Democracy and human rights* is also the development criterion which the NGOs rank highest in terms of their own performance. These findings further indicate the central role democracy and human rights play for the Swedish NGOs.

Democracy and human rights is integrated in the policy documents for most of the NGOs studied, but not all. Of the fifteen organisations which have been studied eleven have clear statements on the issue of how the NGOs will work towards democracy and human rights. The surprising number of NGOs without such reference, may be a reflection of the fact that they take such orientation for granted. In some cases, democracy might be given a special meaning due to the mission of the NGO. For example, the Swedish Afghanistan Committee states that it shall,

...promote peace and stability in an Afghanistan in which the central power is accepted in different part of the country and with a broad base. The basic value should be neutrality between political, religious and ethnic groups.

It is regrettable that the Riddell study paid such limited attention to democracy and human rights, as there is a common belief in the (Swedish) aid community of the comparative advantage and strength of the NGOs in this field. Yet, the strengthening the institution of democracy is a field where relatively little know-how exists and most of the work done so far is quite piecemeal. It points to one area where a similar broad based study as the Proxy evaluation might be required, but focusing on the effectiveness of the Swedish NGOs in building civil society and promoting democracy.

4.11 Project cycle management

The analysis in the Proxy evaluation

The Riddell study, influenced by the T.o.R uses as one of its development impact criteria technical aspects of the NGOs' work such as the,

...extent to which pre-project assessment took place prior to start-up, the extent to which , and the methods by which, on-going project monitoring has taken place, and whether final evaluation has taken place or is planned.²³

We define this criteria as *project cycle management* as they reflect a conventional project cycle process. To reiterate the discussion in chapter 3, a criterion like this is fundamentally different from those derived from official development objectives. It is a technical aspect of development assistance, based on the assumption that adherence to such a project cycle approach would enhance the quality of the project and the effectiveness of the aid. We are not disputing that this might be the case. However, if the broader development objectives are attained without using a conventional project cycle approach, the lack of it does not reduce the development impact.

The Proxy evaluation does not discuss the use of pre-project assessment by the Swedish NGOs in the main analysis, and the discussion of monitoring and evaluation is mainly in the context of their role for persuading other organisations to replicate the models of the Swedish projects. There is a gap in the analysis as in the concluding chapter, Riddell gives considerable weight to the need for M&E and states that:

...there are major gaps and fundamental weaknesses in the manner in which monitoring and evaluation is carried out (by the NGOs) and the results fed back to the NGO sector. Further work is needed to improve monitoring and evaluation techniques and processes and to incorporate these better into the rhythm of NGO life.²⁴

The NGOs' views

In the NGO survey, the Proxy evaluation's statement on monitoring and evaluation was put to the NGOs. On the non-controversial statement that *further work is needed to improve monitoring and evaluation techniques amongst the NGOs*, there was almost complete agreement (96 percent). The NGOs were also asked to rank two of the project cycle elements – appraisal and impact evaluation – amongst fifteen other criteria. The results are given below:

²³ Riddell et al 1995 page 45

²⁴ Riddell et al 1995 page 111

Table 13. Survey results: NGOs' views on appraisal and impact evaluation

Criteria	Appraisal before project starts		Impact evaluation	
	Mean ranking (0-5)	Rank (of 15)	Mean ranking (0-5)	Rank (of 15)
Importance for own work	4,0	6	3,8	9
Own performance	3,5	6	3,2	8
Partner's performance	3,2	5	2,8	10
Usefulness of support in own capacity building	3,4	2	3,4	1

As noted above, these criteria were given the highest relative ranking in terms of usefulness of support from Sida and/or framework organisation in building the NGOs' own capacity. This points to an area where capacity building within the NGO system is in demand and needed. It is also a field in which considerable competence is vested in Sida and there is a vast source of information available in the development literature.

The Riddell report provided a series of specific recommendations to Sida, of which several concerned the role of monitoring and evaluation by the NGOs. In the survey the NGOs were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with these recommendations. The result of the survey is further discussed in chapter 7 but in general, there is a strong majority arguing that such support would be useful.

A majority of the NGOs consider monitoring and evaluation in their work as reflected in the policy documents studied. Only three of the fifteen organisations studied do not address the issue at all in these documents. On the other hand, some of the organisations have given it special attention in handbooks for evaluation. For example, Rädda Barnen has produced guidelines for planning, monitoring and evaluation for their programme, based on a project cycle approach. They define key concepts, the methods, the purpose of evaluation both as a tool for learning and auditing, and different types of evaluations such as expert-oriented evaluations, participative evaluations and self-evaluation in the context of Rädda Barnen's activities. An assessment of the documents concerning M&E show that they overall reflect the 'state of the art' in the field. Notably, even smaller non-frame NGOs use methods such as LFA in their project planning process. We conclude that M&E is fairly well integrated in the policies of the NGOs studied.

The Riddell study was commissioned by Sida with the underlying objective of assisting the capacity building in the NGOs especially in the area of impact assessment. The survey clearly indicates that Sida should continue this process. However, as will be further discussed in chapter 7, there is a strong consensus amongst the NGOs that Sida has not yet acted upon the recommendations by the study to any great extent.

5. The perceived impact of the Proxy evaluation on the NGOs

In the survey the NGOs were asked to comment on the perceived impact of the Riddell study on their work in two different ways. First, in an open question they were asked to comment on what type of influence the Riddell study had on their operations. This question was followed up with similar questions in the personal interviews with the NGOs. Second, they were asked to define to what extent the Riddell report had influenced their work specifically in respect of the fifteen development criteria applied. The results are presented below. It should be stressed that the expression of impact is limited obviously only to NGOs which have an awareness of the Proxy evaluation. As further discussed, amongst those, only a minority claim any impact of the study.

5.1 General views on impact

The NGOs which claim that the Proxy evaluation had any impact, give a number of examples of such impact. Some of these statements are generally what might be called conceptual influence, i.e. rather broad statements of influence on thinking and perceptions. Examples of the responses are indicated below:

We were inspired in general by the report.

It worked as a catalyst. It formulated what we had thought but not yet expressed.

It helped us look back to be able to take a step forward.

The report started important discussions within the organisation.

Riddell's study was part of an international trend. Thus, our international sister organisations had the same discussions, which we, thanks to the report, could become lead of. It was a good input.

Other views express the influence of the Proxy evaluation on the NGOs' strategic thinking, methodology and project formulation:

It stimulated us to think more strategically of our work.

We realised the importance that the long-term development effects are made explicit.

We understood better the importance of clear formulation of objectives in projects.

It has given an input to our concepts and methods of development.

It has helped us develop a more clear view on what are the goals and what are the means. It made things happen.

Some of the comments concern a perceived influence of the Riddell study on the interaction between Sida and the NGOs, and in between the NGOs:

The whole process improved our relationship to Sida; we are more aware of one another now.

The study contributed to a common terminology which made the discussion more focused – it reduced the misconceptions in the discussions between the NGOs and between the NGOs and Sida.

It had as an effect a better exchange between the NGOs and led to co-operation between the framework organisations.

These qualitative statements confirm to a great extent the responses to the inquiry during the preparatory study by Sida in the autumn of 1997 and referred to in chapter 1. This is no surprise as they are made by largely the same handful of framework NGOs. While this group expresses considerable impact of the Proxy evaluation, we fail to see any similar expression amongst the non-framework NGOs, and there are also a few of the framework NGOs which are not crediting the Proxy evaluation with any influence whatsoever. The changes they acknowledge are triggered by other stimuli than the Riddell study:

We made an evaluation in 1992. It pressed the needs for better partners, better reach of the grass roots, capacity building in grass root NGOs, gender analysis and analysis of the social and economic environment we work in. The changes were already on-going when the Riddell study took place.

We have not heard about the Proxy evaluation, but because the world changed since 1990, our organisation had to change. We made a major revision after the Cold War ended.

Riddell's analysis was made by many others years before him. There was nothing really new in it, but it confirmed many viewpoints.

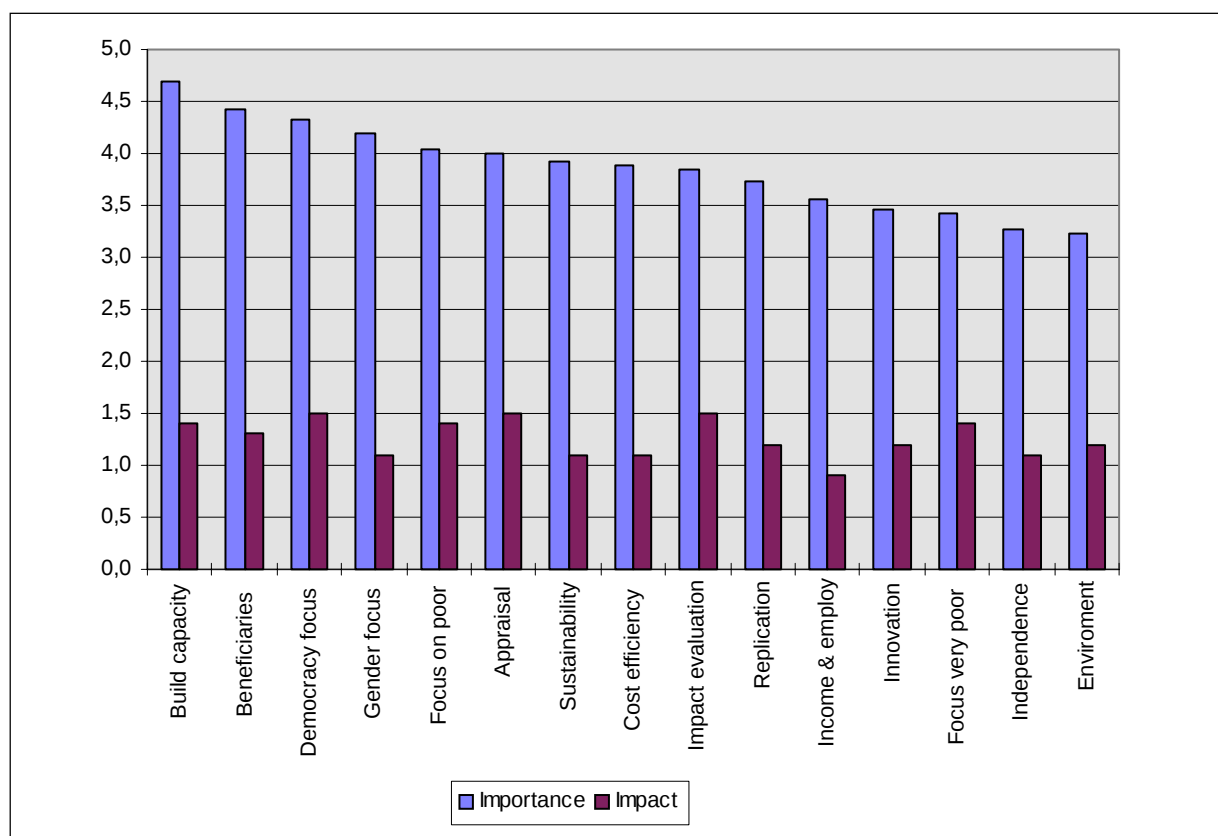
It must be stressed, there is a considerable range in the reactions to the Riddell study and its associated process. While some of the framework NGOs indicate a whole range of effects of a conceptual nature, the majority of the NGOs claim no impact. The reasons for this is further elaborated below.

5.2 Impact on specific subject matters

The rating by the NGOs which are aware of the Proxy evaluation of the perceived impact of the Proxy evaluation on the fifteen specific criteria used in the survey is fairly low. In response to the question: *to what degree has the Proxy evaluation influenced your work or your views on these (15) aspects*, the average rating of those who are aware of the Riddell study is 1 on a scale of 0 – 5 with 5 as the highest rating.

The NGOs claim a slightly higher impact on what we have defined as the *project cycle management approach*, including undertaking *appraisal* of projects prior to their start and to undertaking *impact evaluations* of the projects after they are ended. The survey also indicated that the NGOs found the Riddell report slightly more influential on *poverty issues* and the issue of *capacity building*, while the NGOs ranked the influence of the Riddell report lowest on the issues of *stimulating income generation and employment*, *cost-effectiveness in the approach* and *gender*.

Figure 4. Survey results: NGOs' assessment of the importance of the development criteria and their view of the impact of the Proxy evaluation



In order to establish a composite, quantitative measure of 'perceived' impact, we have calculated the distribution of averages on these rankings from the survey. This analysis is presented in table 14:²⁵

Table 14. Survey results: The perceived degree of impact of the Proxy evaluation by the NGOs (percent)

Share of NGOs, aware of the Proxy Evaluation, which claim:	Average rating	Frame	Non frame
No impact what so ever	0	11%	100%
Marginal impact	below 1	33%	—
Moderate impact	1-3	45%	—
Substantial impact	above 3	11%	—

On this admittedly subjective scale, we note that about half of the framework NGOs claim a moderate to substantial degree of influence on their work by the Riddell study. In two cases the framework organisations have disclaimed any influence what so ever of the study on the subject matters

²⁵ For each of the 15 criteria (see Annex 5 section C), the average of the ranking (0-5) has been defined as follows: 0 for all 15 criteria: no impact what so ever; ranking of less than 1 on the average: 'marginal' impact; 1-3 on the average, 'moderate' impact; and above 3 as an average: 'substantial impact'.

discussed in the report, and in a third of the cases, we define the influence as marginal. Amongst the non-framework NGOs, on the other hand, all of those who were aware of the study, and responded to the questions, claimed no influence what so ever. Thus, the analysis confirms our earlier observation: whatever direct impact the Riddell study is perceived to have had on the NGOs, it has been on the framework organisations

These findings put the result of the preparatory study in perspective: at the NGO level the Proxy evaluation is perceived to have a considerable influence in a handful of framework NGOs, but beyond that, very little, if any such impact is recognised. In summary, the majority of the NGOs have never heard of the Proxy evaluation; and a large share of those who are familiar with the study argues it lacked influence. These findings can appear discouraging, given the considerable budget allocated to the study and the efforts to involve the NGOs in the preparation of the study, and dissemination of its findings. However, the framework NGOs are organisations handling considerable volumes of aid, directly or indirectly, hence an impact on this population has potential effects on a large share of the NGO support. The findings show, nevertheless, that the dissemination process by Sida has not been effective beyond the first layer of NGOs.

5.3 Discarding the details, accepting the broad picture

The claim by the (framework) NGOs of considerable impact as expressed in these statements, together with the general positive attitude towards the study as earlier discussed, is somewhat surprising. The study is in its details quite critical of the Swedish NGO assistance. There is in fact little good to be said about the NGO support when judged against the nine development criteria according to Riddell. Normal psychological defence mechanisms would, especially in sensitive areas like the Swedish NGO support being assessed by a team of foreigners, imply that the NGOs refuted the study as incorrect or irrelevant. In fact, in the details of the study, taking the 25 key statements by Riddell used in the survey, the majority of the NGOs disagree with Riddell. The in-depth interviews gives two explanations for this ‘incoherence’:

1) a common expression is that the study *was critical to others but not to us*. The NGO community is diverse: there is room for animosity, internal criticism and there is also a considerable degree of ignorance of what other NGOs are doing. Thus, the larger NGOs tend to see the criticism by Riddell mainly concerning the smaller NGOs; the small organisations believed the negative reviews by the Proxy evaluation concerned churches, while the churches believed it concerned the organisations dealing with only one question, etc.

2) there is a genuine interest to learn; many of the NGOs are self-critical, and welcome an outside analysis of their work;

In conclusion, the study apparently succeeded in taking quite a critical look at the work of the Swedish NGOs, and thereby also provide considerable food for thought, while avoiding the dilemma of triggering defence mechanisms amongst the NGOs. By design or by default this was quite an achievement by the evaluation team. We believe the participatory approach was helpful in this respect. The number of meetings arranged helped to defuse defence mechanisms.

5.4 What are the factors determining awareness and impact?

An important question emerges from the study: why has the Proxy evaluation not been subject for a more extensive dissemination or discussion to the non-frame NGOs by their umbrella organisations? From the study, and our interviews some hypotheses can be put forward.

First, as has been discussed earlier in this report, about half of the NGOs perceive the Proxy evaluation as useful and as having an impact, while the balance of the frame NGOs claim no or only marginal impact. The reasons given by the latter frame-NGOs are basically that the Proxy evaluation provided little that was new, that a discussion on the themes chosen by the Proxy evaluation was already ongoing, and that the critical findings basically concerned other NGOs. An umbrella NGO which thought the Proxy evaluation of limited relevance or providing little new information, is not likely to spend much efforts in promoting its results amongst its member organisations. However, organisations that found the study of relevance and contributing to the internal strategic discussion seem also only to a small extent have disseminated the findings of the study to their members. Partly this is due to incorporation of these discussion in the overall on-going organisational development, making it difficult to isolate influence of the Proxy evaluation. For example, one umbrella NGO claimed that its propagation of LFA amongst its member NGOs was a result of the Proxy evaluation. However, the study did not discuss LFA, making the link tenuous.

A potentially more important hypothesis is that the dissemination has been hampered by a less than well functioning organisational system. This, in its turn can be attributed to a number of factors:

- 1) Some umbrella NGOs have a fairly weak position versus their members, with a limited role to play, to some extent of an administrative nature. By nature of the internal structure, they have not a clear role in a process of organisational development.
- 2) Capacity problem to undertake vigorous development work for a cadre of member organisations is another factor. This was expressed by one frame NGO as follows:

we can't afford to run to all this seminars and meetings. We are a lean organisation with low overheads. We have enough to work with our members.

- 3) Capacity at the non-framework NGO level. The focus is on hands-on work, NGOs might be a 'one-man show' and the capacity to be involved in more theoretical discussions of aid is severely limited.
- 4) We also believe there is an issue of organisational culture: During the interviews we found many expressions amongst smaller NGOs of an alienation from what was often described as an increasingly aid bureaucratic culture in the NGO system in which the framework NGOs play an intermediary role, but increasingly distancing themselves from the members. On one hand, they participate in an international discourse with its own increasingly professional jargon in which Sida is a part. On the other hand, they represent often member organisations run by people contributing un-paid part time work, driven by ideals of solidarity between people, sometimes with difficulties in communicating in English. There is a certain contempt for the 'theorising' and bureaucratisation amongst such NGOs, also affecting the framework NGOs which tend to be seen as increasingly function as aid-bureaucracies.

There are several lessons to be drawn from this:

The concept of framework and umbrella NGOs is driven by Sida with the purpose to find a way of dealing with a large number of NGOs given Sida's limited administrative capacity. Sida might have to rethink this model. There are strong expressions of dissatisfaction amongst non-frame NGOs of the de-linking to the funding agency, and also expressions of appreciation with such links exist, for example in seminars, etc.

In Sida's capacity studies, the organisational system in which frame and member organisations co-operate, rather than the frame NGO as an institution should be subject for study.

The possible widening gap between a professional aid elite in Sida/NGOs and origin of the NGO support based on solidarity between people should be investigated in terms of its existence, and its consequences.

6. Impact at the field level

6.1 India

The Indian NGO Sector

India has a long tradition of volunteerism. Some of it has its origins in the traditional community and religious practices. The modern voluntary sector has grown as a result of the work undertaken by some of the social reformers in the last two centuries of which Mahatma Gandhi is the most well known. The traditional Indian voluntary sector has functioned through self-help group, mostly unorganised, and constituted by people who have other means of earning their livelihood. Christian Missionaries have made a special contribution to the formation of community development groups in a relatively organised manner. Since the late 1960s, the availability of public funds from the Western countries has led to the formation of NGOs. Since the 1980s, the Government of India has itself adapted the policy of providing funding to NGOs for development purposes. The latest five-year plan document has a full chapter on the NGOs.

There is no precise statistics available about the growth of Indian NGOs. But most articles in the media estimate that about 20,000 NGOs are now registered in India. While some of them might be registered on paper but not active, there are many traditional self-help groups which would not be registered as NGOs. The statistics on funding is even less reliable but most sections of the media mention that Indian NGOs receive about 150 million USD per year from outside the country.

There are mixed perceptions about the role of NGOs in India. While most NGOs are seen as agents of change, the Indian sector at large is not free from charges of corruption and external accountability. Some NGOs are nationally and internationally known as case studies in innovation. Interestingly, most of the success stories relate to poor women's initiatives for self-empowerment and economic freedom.

In general, Indian NGOs have the following characteristics:

- Willingness to put in voluntary work without remuneration
- Financial constraints, especially in the management capacity since funds are available for projects but not for managerial staff
- Narrow ownership pattern, with one or two persons controlling the management, partially for the financial reason mentioned above
- Orientation towards poor, with only a handful of institutions in New Delhi and other large cities engaged in policy related work
- An increasing tendency on the part of educated professionals to join the NGO sector in comparison with well-paid private business corporations or the government.

The India Case Study of Lewis and Francis in the Proxy evaluation was narrow in understanding the support base of the Indian NGO sector. It must be noted that unlike some other developing countries in Asia and Africa, while Indian NGO would consider external financial input valuable, they also have many indigenous sources available ranging from the Indian government itself to business foundations and community trusts.

The Swedish NGO support

According to the Swedish mission in India, until the beginning of 1998, India received SEK 300 million in grants annually on an average, besides SEK 150 million in soft credits. In addition Sweden provided SEK 10 million to NGOs and SEK 3 million for research²⁶. Besides the aid from Sida to Indian NGOs, Swedish NGOs also have a direct relationship with their Indian counterparts. SEK 26 million were channelled through Sida's NGO window in 1997. This aid increased from SEK 10 million at the beginning of the 1980s to around SEK 30 million towards the end of the 1980s. It has remained stagnant in volume for almost a decade. Thus, in total, Sweden contributes SEK 40 million to the Indian NGO sector. It is an estimated 3 percent of the total flow of external sources to that sector.

Church is the most important link in the Swedish-India NGO to NGO relations, estimated to be accounting for at least half of the volume of assistance. Also, Swedish NGO aid is highly concentrated in rural part of Tamil Nadu. The managers of most Swedish supported NGOs are Christians in a country where Hindus and Muslims form 95 percent of the population. Missionary support for Indian NGO has become controversial in the politics of growing religious hatred. However, Swedish supported NGOs have so far not been affected or criticised, but the risk factor in the future should not be dismissed.

The nature of NGO to NGO relations appears parental with one way communication and heavy dependence on funds as the basis of relationship, though some Indian NGOs do thank their Swedish partners for ideas in very general terms. About a third of Indian NGOs surveyed in this study mentioned that Swedish NGOs are involved in conceptual stages of the project. Otherwise, it is a case of funds transfer if a good project has been conceptualised by the Indian NGO. The relations between Indian and Swedish NGO are described as parental because Indian NGOs seek funds from the Swedish partner and submit them periodical performance reports. There are rare, if any, cases of the Swedish NGOs wanting to learn from Indian partners. This is surprising since Indian NGOs have an experience of working in a difficult environment and they also receive funds from various other sources along with some experience and ideas which the Swedish NGOs might benefit from.

The Proxy evaluation and Indian NGOs

In order to assess the impact of the Proxy evaluations at the field level in India, detailed discussion was held, by phone and/or fax and in person, with partner NGOs identified by the Swedish NGOs. Of the 20 Indian partner NGOs identified, a few could not be contacted. This study draws its conclusions from a discussion with 15 Indian NGOs. The NGOs interviewed, with some of their characteristics, are given in annex 7.

It must be clarified that time and resources did not make it possible to undertake field level analysis of the statements made by the chief co-ordinators of the Indian NGOs. Almost all of the NGOs are spread in distant villages. Even a couple of NGOs having offices in cities such as Mumbai (Bombay), Delhi and Calcutta, have only administrative staff in these cities. These offices were visited but it was not possible to visit projects in rural areas. Instead, it was assumed in good faith that the representatives had provided correct information.

²⁶ Sweden suspended aid to India following the nuclear testing by the latter in May 1998. It is not clear when this embargo will be lifted. But it is understood from the Swedish sources that Sweden is likely to reduce its aid to India when it is resumed and focus primarily on poverty reduction

The findings

Of the 15 Indian NGOs interviewed, 5 are aware of the Proxy evaluation. Three of them have had substantive discussions, of varying degrees, with their Swedish counterparts about the outcome of Proxy evaluation and the need to undertake some changes. The other 2 were aware of Proxy evaluation, and one of them had met with the British team which had prepared the case-study. But they had no discussions with the Swedish partners about the results of Proxy evaluation.

Of various recommendations made by Proxy evaluation to Sida, some are relevant to the Indian partners – while others are relevant to the NGOs in Sweden only.

With regards to the recommendation that Sida should assist NGOs to assess development impact of their projects, and associated suggestions about learning from European NGOs and preparing a manual of ‘best practices’ in monitoring and evaluations, there would be considerable interest among Indian partner NGOs. All of the Indian NGOs said that they would like to have a regular impact analysis. A few representatives of Indian NGOs added that the impact analysis should cover both Indian and Swedish partners. While expressing interest in regular impact-analysis, all Indian NGOs reported that they had not been advised of any new method of undertaking such as analysis since 1995.

With regards to the recommendation to issue new guidelines, these were only issued in April 1998. It was obvious that they had not been disseminated to India by September 1998, considering the summer holidays in Sweden in between.

The main recommendations of the Proxy evaluation’s India case study by Lewis and Francis were:

- *There should be long-term funding used for NGO capacity-building as well as projects.* An in-depth would be necessary to make a reliable comment on this issue.
- *There should be improvement in administrative practice.* This recommendation has not had any impact. Most NGOs have large staff but management is in the hands of 1 or 2 individuals.
- *There should be contextualising of Sida’s NGO support.* Nothing has changed since 1995, except perhaps a more vocal endorsement of environmental and gender concerns. The whole question of the context of Sida’s support needs careful discussion.
- *Clarifying DCO’s role.* This suggestion certainly has not gone too far. DCO does not even basic information about the names and relationships of Swedish NGOs functioning through proxy route in India.

Proxy evaluation made certain observations about Swedish NGOs. They can not apply in total to Indian NGOs since the latter mix the Swedish funds with resources from other foreign as well as Indian donors. Therefore, except in a few cases where the dependence on Swedish NGOs is 75 percent or more, Indian NGOs would be influenced by many different perspectives. In any case, a vast majority (all except 2) of the Indian NGOs have reported that the Swedish partners have not advised them about any substantive issues such as poverty focus, sustainability, environmental concerns, gender equality, etc. In summary, the response of Indian NGOs to the observations made in the Proxy evaluation was as follows.

Proxy evaluation said that NGOs do not *focus on poverty*. About 40 percent agree with this statement while the remaining 60 percent disagree quoting their own work as examples.

An overwhelming proportion of NGO respondents are trying to address *environmental concerns and gender equality issues*. This cannot be in any way attributed to the Proxy evaluation. The Indian NGO sector has grown sensitive to environmental and gender concern in the 1990s due to many factors, including efforts made by the Indian Government agencies and NGOs.

About half of the Indian NGOs covered by this study claim that they *involve local beneficiaries* in project planning.

In most cases, Indian NGOs believe that it is impossible for them to *sustain projects* without donor support. It need not be Swedish support. If the Swedish partner withdraws, they would need to be replaced by other donors or one of the schemes of the Indian government. Low sustainability seems obvious to NGOs because they believe that their target groups are very poor. Some of them are aware of this issue and would like to empower the beneficiary through income generation programmes. Thus, in rural India, long-term sustainability and income-generation are interlinked.

Conclusions

The Indian NGO sector is a vast ocean with over 20,000 registered NGOs, and many traditional ones, which might not be registered. Whatever Swedish NGOs do in India in partnership with Indian NGOs can be effective at the local level with good project management. It can be easily described as solving the needs of the poor. Yet in the broad scene, it might be of limited value. The question to be asked in any specific case is: Can the Swedish NGO be replaced by another source of funds if only the Indian NGO manager had access to an alternative source? If the answer to this question is 'yes', then the Swedish NGO is merely another financial supporter. Being a financial supporter to some 100 small projects can have merit for the beneficiary local communities, but the aggregate impact would be too marginal and scattered. Sida might hold consultations with Swedish NGOs on their aggregate impact in India and brainstorm alternatives, including creation of training and policy research institutes at the state level.

Almost half of the Swedish NGOs or their Indian partners are related to the Church. This was natural in view of the pattern of evolution of the Swedish NGO links with India. Of late Swedish trade unions and secular NGOs have also found partners in India. The dominance of the Church support can be a potentially sensitive issue in India where the politics of religion, including criticism of missionary supported development work is on the rise. Sida might encourage non-Church NGOs and DCO to promote partnership in India with a view to acquire some balance in the overall composition of Swedish aid.

All Indian NGOs are appreciative of their Swedish partners, but perceive the latter primarily as sources of funds. Some Indian NGOs benefit from 'ideas' exchanged with Swedish partners but Swedish NGOs rarely ask Indian NGOs for advice and ideas, despite the vast and complex experience of the Indian NGO sector. Swedish NGOs should be encouraged to develop a two-way communication with their Indian partners.

There is a tendency in India to treat NGOs as one-man shop of the promoter, even though vast amount of public money, including Swedish public money is utilised. Despite a staff strength of up to 300 persons, the management capacity is narrowly vested in one or two persons. It is recommended that Swedish NGOs should make resources available to their Indian partners exclusively for expanding management strengths.

The Swedish Embassy in India has no information on the NGOs operating through the NGO window. It is not only necessary for the Embassy to have such an information, but also to compare notes on a regular basis with Swedish NGOs in order to avoid overlaps and achieve balance,

wherever possible, in the overall composition of Swedish aid. It is recommended that the Swedish Embassy should hold consultations with Asia division heads of Swedish NGOs and the representatives of Indian NGOs to work out modalities for information sharing and co-ordination.

6.2 The cases of Tanzania and Zimbabwe

Background

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with representatives of six NGOs in each country, roughly half of them local NGOs. As a complement representatives of the Swedish NGO field offices have filled in a part of the questionnaire used in the Swedish survey. Interviews have also been undertaken with those representatives at the Swedish Embassies who have the main responsible for NGO contacts in the two countries. The NGOs selected was based on information provided by the Swedish framework organisations and by a sample of non-framework organisations of their local partners. In view of time constraints, the interviews were limited to the capitals, Dar es Salaam and Harare.

All those interviewed have shown a keen interest in submitting information, both factual data and own assessments of their work. The interviews have focused on how NGOs, both Swedish and local, can live up to donor expectations as regards effectiveness and efficiency. Of particular interest has been the capacity of the NGOs to assess their role in the long term perspective, i.e. capacity building, local ownership and a phasing out of the expatriate expertise as well as financial support.

Even if the number of interviews is limited they illustrate the situation amongst a cross-section of NGOs who for a long time have been engaged in East Africa and co-operated with local communities, Government agencies and NGOs (e.g. Pentecostal Church), and some newly established NGOs who have only very recently benefited from Swedish support (e.g. Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania). However, even if the sample is representative the study is by definition limited in scope and has no ambition to illustrate the complexities of NGO operations in the field.

Tanzania

Two of the large Swedish umbrella NGOs operating in Tanzania have been interviewed – *Forum Syd* and the Pentecostal Church. The latter has a history of some sixty-five years, the former some fifteen years. In addition, a reputable East African organisation – the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) and the International Federation of the Red Cross have been interviewed as well as two rather recently established local NGOs – Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania and Envirocare.

The two large organisations operating in the health sector have their own systems and procedures as regards project preparation, implementation and follow-up. Country representatives of those organisations are not aware of the Sida initiative that led to the Riddell Report, and subsequent new Guidelines for Swedish NGO co-operation. Their activities are so large and of such a character that they long ago established their own computer-based reporting, accounting and auditing system.

A recent initiative by the International Red Cross is to introduce a modern accountancy system to the Tanzania Red Cross, who at present is operating an antiquated manual system. The new system will not, however, be modelled on the International Red Cross system in Geneva, but designed by the local branch of a reputable international consultancy firm, in order to secure local back-stopping, and sustainability. The system is part of an explicit strategy to encourage local and national ownership of development project in this field, and at the same time provide reliable data for reporting to donors on widely different formats.

The Riddell Report has been discussed internally at a number of occasions in *Forum Syd*, both at country level (e.g. a seminar in 1995) and in meetings in Sweden. But there is a feeling that more of follow-up would have been beneficial. Reports have also been distributed to local NGOs, and informal internal discussions have been useful. Staff of the country office of the Pentecostal Church are not aware of the Riddell Report, and they were not invited to seminars or workshops to discuss the findings.

The two relatively new local NGOs have not been part of the 1994-95 assessment, and are not familiar with that Sida initiative. On the other hand they seem fully aware of the need to improve on the capability as regards project preparation and reporting, which sometimes seems a tedious exercise. They have both, however, had assistance from Swedish volunteers who are actively participating in project preparation, in some cases even after having left their post in Tanzania. This input seems to be of crucial importance as regards project document quality, and new Sida Guidelines have most probably played a role here.

The two large Swedish NGOs are well aware of the new Sida Guidelines, even if they have only seen them in draft form, and had a possibility to comment on those earlier versions. It seems, however, as if interpretation of the Guidelines is a matter primarily for their head offices in Sweden, but both are in general positive to the introduction of more precise reporting procedures. They are, however, not convinced that the Guidelines will make the projects more focused on poverty and one questions the tendencies to cut down Sida finance of building projects.

Zimbabwe

Three large Swedish NGOs operating in Zimbabwe have been interviewed. They are *Utan Gränser/SCC*, *Forum Syd* and *Afrikagrupperna*. The local NGOs met are Zimbabwe Farmers Union and Housing People of Zimbabwe co-operating with SCC, and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society which for many years but ending in 1998 has benefited from Sida support via the Swedish Red Cross.

The three large Swedish NGOs are aware of the Riddell study, particularly as regards the draft version. Two NGOs have not on the country level specifically followed up on the final report but one has taken initiative to distribute it to local counterparts. The findings of the report has been discussed on head office management level, and country office representatives have usually been participating in this follow-up. Still, those field representatives of framework organisations have the feeling that the report has not been fully exploited and more could have been done in this field together with the local counterparts. It seems as if the report primarily was a concern of the home head office.

As regards interviewed local counterpart NGOs it seems as if only a few staff have a (faint) memory of the Riddell study several years ago but few seem to have assessed their own work in that context. On the other hand they have experienced several donor enquiries into their modus operandi and project preparation efficiency (see below).

Two of the three Swedish NGOs were fully familiar with the new Sida guidelines of 1998 on NGO co-operation, but copies of the final version was only available in one of the field offices. It was felt that the new guidelines will contribute to the improvement of the NGO projects if they are fully implemented (1), while two NGOs were not explicitly convinced.

The local NGOs are not generally aware of new Sida guidelines on NGO co-operation. On the other hand they feel that most donors now, as opposed to only a couple of years ago, demand much more from them in this field, and the Swedish partner is often at the forefront as regards these issues. Local NGOs have their own agenda and own goals and as long as they are of a general

character donor expectations can usually be accommodated. Still, it seems difficult comprehend the implications of for instance the six general Swedish development goals in their own project design. There is, however, a clear tendency to accept that own ambitions now have to be operationalised to a greater extent than 2-3 years ago.

The local NGOs have a feeling that many donors now expect more of professionalism in project preparation and reporting, and it seems as if they have a feeling that particularly as regards Swedish support this is increasingly important. It is also clear that those local NGOs who have a close co-operation with the Swedish counterpart NGO country office have been actively pursued to improve on project preparation and reporting. Even if the feeling is that this is tedious extra work, it is accepted as it is considered a precondition for donor support through the Swedish counterpart.

Conclusions

The Riddell study was undertaken four years ago and most of those who were interviewed or concerned with the discussions of the draft versions as well as participated in the workshops and seminars have not actually seen the final report. Staff in the field have a feeling that those issues were a concern primarily of their head office. It seems as if even now most of the NGOs' strategy work as well as final project preparations are undertaken there.

The new Sida Guidelines seems to have an effect in several steps. First, they are a concern for the Swedish head office staff and the governing boards of the NGOs. Secondly, the experienced and competent field office staff secure the information they need, whether they obtain written information or not and integrates it with ongoing work. Parallel processes are going on in other donor agencies, as well as in international agencies like the Red Cross.

A third level of influence is emanating from the country offices of the Swedish NGOs or the umbrella organisation, directly and strongly influencing the way projects and programmes now are conceived. The influence – how radical, fast and thorough – seems to depend on how qualified and respected the country office representative is rather than on a control of or influence on finance possibilities as such.

It seems as if in a number of national NGOs the competence and capability of Board and Secretariat is considerable, compared to a few years ago. Thus, there is scope for an improvement of project preparation and reporting. What has to be taken into account, however, is the fact that NGOs by those working with them mostly are considered a way of earning a livelihood, not something people are interested in as a result of a dedication to a specific issue, which is the Scandinavian tradition.

Swedish Embassy representatives and Sida staff working with NGOs in the two countries acknowledge that Sweden has two parallel channels for transfer of resources within a development co-operation context – the official Sida projects, and the NGOs'. Because of this embassies do not actively involve themselves in assisting Swedish NGOs, or advising them or trying to "guide" them. That NGOs have their own agenda is fully accepted. A consequence of this is, however, that embassies do not know of all activities going on, whether financed by Sida or not. Thus, there is no comprehensive country data base on Swedish development aid.

As Sida to an increasing extent is demanding better project proposals and reporting, Sida staff or/and Swedish umbrella organisations are asked by local partners to contribute advice on how to more effectively undertake this work. This occasionally creates tensions within local NGOs, and between those and Swedish NGOs.

Almost everyone responsible for those tasks at NGOs is now aware of the need for professionalism and transparency. For some Swedish NGOs this is a dilemma as they feel that their local counterpart organisations and staff are not capable of living up to those (Sida) expectations. The result could be, as it is felt, a slower handing over of responsibility and less of local ownership.

It seems as if there is a strong NGO tradition to focus on the own organisation and own tasks. Rarely have NGOs in Zimbabwe and Tanzania taken the initiative to meet with other NGOs to discuss overall development trends, project implementation problems, experience of methods development, etc. Some commendable initiatives, however, does not include the religious organisations. Likewise, it is a tradition that embassies call for joint discussions of important issues only once every two years, sometimes nowadays every year. It is a fact that embassy development co-operation staff usually have much more of information sharing with representatives of other bilateral donors than with Swedish or local NGOs, financed by Sida. There are tendencies, however, that this artificial separation of “Sida-projects” and NGO activities is breaking down.

A number of local NGOs are showing signs of aggressively marketing their ideas, criticising sloppy Government agencies, and establish themselves as an informal political force. In this process support from a donor is looked upon as an invaluable asset and donors are threading the fine line between support to established and new structures in the same sector. As “sector programme support” is becoming more prevalent, this dilemma has to be solved.

7. Impact on the government and the relationship with the NGOs

7.1 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Interviews with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that the Ministry has taken considerable notice of the Proxy evaluation and the discussions that emanated from it. Our sources claim a distinct influence is at hand. The study contributed to a changed view of the NGOs and speeded up a process of dealing with the NGO support. The NGOs role in developing civil society was already discussed before the study was presented, but the report gave a in part new picture of the organisations impact on civil society. This influenced the policy work. The study showed that the NGOs fulfil their goals, but there were questions to what extent they carry out their main task: the building of democratic civil institutions. The effect of this result on the Ministry was that it became more clear in formulating what should be the goals of Swedish NGOs' development assistance. It should be noted that the Proxy evaluation in fact has little to say on the promotion of democracy and building civil society, and our interpretation of the 'impact' of the Proxy evaluation is more of a catalyst effect, than using the findings of the study to implement change.

In the *regleringsbrev* of 1997 the importance of NGOs development work and their role as organisations builders in civil society was highlighted. This is to be considered as very general recommendations to Sida, but a normative action which will have great impact.

The Proxy evaluation is still today a much discussed subject, and references to the findings of Riddell are made in various policy discussion. The issues which are often seen on the agenda is organisational capacity building and sustainability. Formulation of *more clearly stated expectations* in the co-operation with NGOs is one way the Proxy evaluation has influenced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The development of civil society has thus become a higher priority. There is today a higher degree of dialogue with the NGOs which is linked to the needs of being more explicit in the demands.

There has been a re-organisation of the Ministry which is not connected to the Proxy evaluation. In 1995, the NGO had a special secretariat with an "NGO Ambassador". Today the NGOs support is handled directly by the different sections of the Ministry.

7.2 Impact on Sida's relation to the NGOs

The Proxy evaluation has played an important role for the NGO Division and is used as a reference even today, four years after its completion. In the end of 1995, the head of SEKA, Carin Norberg, made an inventory of the actions taken by Sida as follow up to the Riddell study, the issues identified in this process and the plans for the future to implement some changes. The memo pointed at three key conclusions as a result of the process: 1) the need for better co-ordination between the NGOs and Sida at home and in the field; 2) active participation by the NGOs in Sida's policy work, and 3) overhauling of Sida's guidelines for the NGO support. The memo pointed at a number of areas where the co-operation between Sida and the NGOs in policy related work was on-going. A concrete initiative by Sida was the establishment of an NGO Network to facilitate the relationship with the NGOs.

Overall, the Proxy evaluation is described by Sida staff as a major input into a change process in the relationship between Sida and the NGOs. Due to the 'off-hands' approach to the NGO projects implied in the government's mandate for Sida, the NGO projects tend to be little known by Sida

staff. There is less imperative to follow up on projects in the field, and the diversity and magnitude of the projects makes it almost impossible for a single administrator to get a clear picture of the projects from the reporting. Carl Tham, the former head of Sida, is claimed to have captured this in an illustrative sentence:

Everyone loves this form of aid, but no one knows how it functions

The Proxy evaluation is described by staff members as a milestone in changing this:

The Proxy evaluation gave us a much better basis for understanding the NGO's projects. It became less guesswork based on personal impressions, and more of a systematic analysis. We could argue more from a basis of facts, rather than emotions.

Without the Proxy evaluation we would not have been able to work out the new Guidelines as we have, and if we had done it, we would not have had the good response....

According to another Sida staff, to some extent this attitude and conditions led to a management of the NGO support to become highly administrative, in the sense that most time of the staff was spent on formalities around applications and reporting, and very little on subject matter involvement. According to the same source, there is a change in Sida in this respect, that the 'new Sida' is upgrading its role, partly by recruitment of new staff:

With all respect for the administrators in the past, the new cadre have better training, can engage in analysis in a more profound way, and might therefore be less frightened of asking questions...

Another aspect of Sida's NGO management is that the NGO Division to a large extent is an isolated island in the overall Sida organisation in the sense that there is little knowledge of what the NGO support contain by other parts of the organisation, and little interaction on a country level between NGO projects and the bilateral assistance. This was a reflection of Riddell, and the study also made some recommendations in this context. Sida staff admits little has changed although more exchange of experiences with NGOs in the field was expressed as one of the goals emanating from the Proxy evaluation²⁷. In the field studies we conclude that this is still an issue, and a major problem. It might reflect that the willingness, or opportunities, to learn from the NGOs experiences is limited. In the words of a staff member:

The NGO support is a strange animal in Sida: the other parts of the organisation do not know about it, and take no interest in it. At the embassy level, they often have no idea of what is on-going in the NGO support; it is not perceived as their mandate. In a country report, this aid form can be described in a line or two, while in money terms plays a quite important role.

However, as a positive sign of a stronger inter-organisational learning and interaction the NGOs are increasingly drawn into Sida's country strategy formulation process.

The Riddell study defined Sida's management role concerning the NGO support as

a bridge between the Swedish Parliament, which provides the funds used by the Swedish NGOs, and the NGOs, which utilise these funds. As its broadest, Sida's role is to ensure, as far as possible, that Swedish taxpayers' money is being used as effectively and efficiently as possible, and in a manner for which it was intended.²⁸

²⁷ *Vad händer efter Riddell-rapporten?*, Rundskrivelse SEKA, Carin Norberg (29 November 1995).

²⁸ Riddell et al, 1995, page 105

Riddell *et al* acknowledged the different opinions in Sida on how such a role should be played – from a minimalist, reactive role, seeking to interfere as little as possible in choosing or influencing NGO projects, to a more proactive stand, that NGOs’ work needs to be critically examined and Sida has a role to ‘manage’ and develop this support. In a choice between these different schools, the Riddell team leaned towards the latter, arguing that Sida should, on the behalf of the Swedish taxpayers, be more proactive within the framework of ensuring that the ‘development impact’ of the NGOs’ work is maximised. The Proxy evaluation also recognises that there might be other objectives than *development impact* behind the NGO support, such as *solidarity*, or state support to the NGOs in their own right. However, the study limits itself to the developmental issues.

Riddell is critical of the ways Sida is handling the NGO support on several grounds. The criticism is that Sida’s NGO division has demanded too little feed back on the development impact of the NGO projects, and merely limit itself to a financial accounting that money has not ‘gone astray’. The study also claims that there is inefficiency in the use of government funds due to a *mutual ignorance within Sida of what different parts of Sida are doing in the projects and programmes they individually fund relating to NGOs*. The study identifies a series of problems due to this: NGO proposals are sometimes handled arbitrarily, turned down by one part of Sida, accepted by another; there is potential double funding of the same project, and there is lost synergy in sectors where there is considerable bilateral aid and NGO support.

At the same time, Sida staff acknowledge that the study has some short-comings in the sense that it not fully comprehended and took into account the special feature of the NGOs in the Swedish aid system:

Riddell never understood the uniqueness of the Swedish popular movement: we sat down many times, and we talked about it, but I guess you have to be Swedish, or at least Scandinavian to understand it - it is part of our culture, you can trace it to medieval times and I don't think you find the same feature anywhere else in the world...

Overall, Sida does not only have a strong respect for the autonomy of the NGOs’ in line with the policy laid down by the government, but also for the professionalism of the NGOs in development assistance. In the words of one staff member:

Sida is the ‘little brother’ in relation to many of the NGOs. They have been involved in this for such a long time, have established networks of many decades, and a lot of practical experience. What is Sida? Five, six persons dealing with this complexity with a budget of almost a billion per annum. We have to rely on the NGOs. It would be presumptuous to believe their business better than they do...

Some of Riddell’s statements were included in the survey to enlist the views of the NGOs whether they found the views accurate or not. Below the results are given.

Table 15. Survey results: NGOs' views on the relationship with Sida

Statement	Agree	Disagree	If agree		
			Same	Better	Worse
There has been no requirement for NGOs to provide evidence to Sida that the fund they have received have been used effectively	11	89	100	—	—
NGOs evaluation and monitoring seem to be done to meet Sida's needs and biased towards financial accounting of how Sida's funds are used, rather than concern over development impact	31	69	60	40	
The reporting requirements for Swedish NGOs in receipt of state funds are in many ways insufficient to inform parliament and the wider public about the impact of projects using such funds	61	39	33	67	—

As noted above, the NGOs strongly disagree with the Proxy evaluation's claim that Sida is not requesting information to show that NGO funds are used effectively, and the majority also disagree that the evaluation and monitoring undertaken by them mainly is to provide Sida with financial information, not with feed back on development impact. However, they do agree in majority that the reporting in general to a wider audience in Sweden is insufficient.

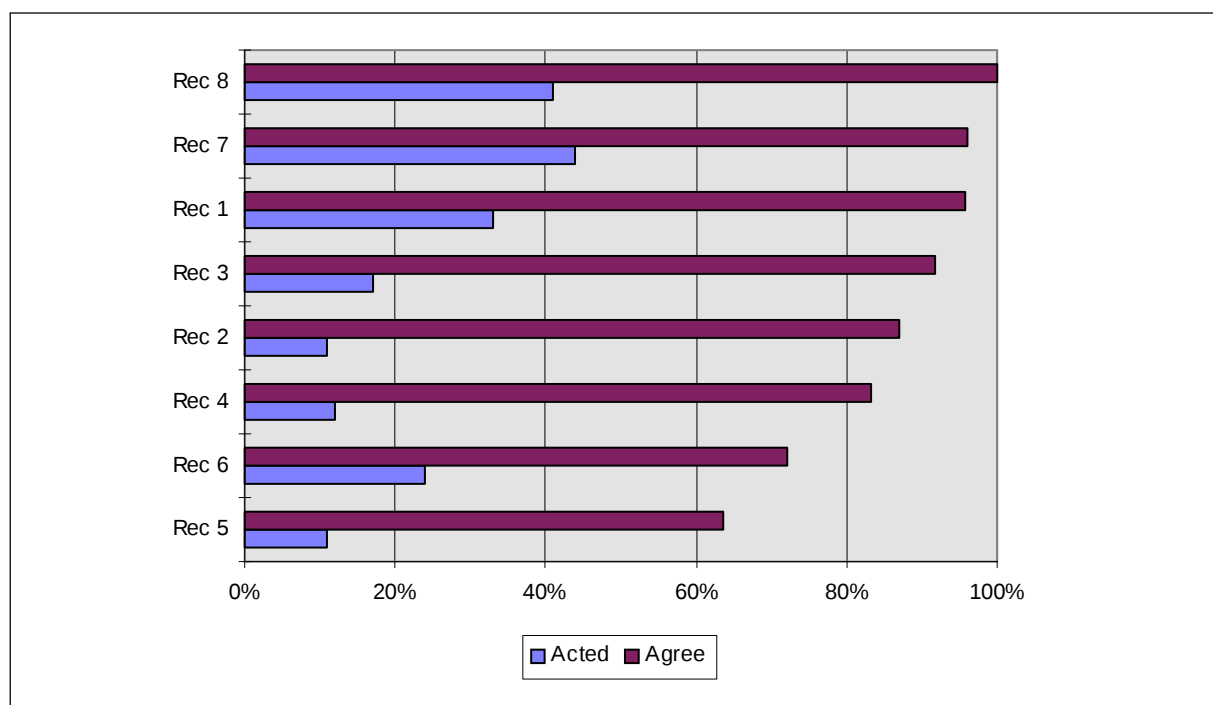
We conclude that the management of the NGO support is changing towards a more analytical approach, and less of a purely administrative approach. Such a change can not be attributed to the influence of the Proxy evaluation, but reflects broader policies of Sida.

7.3 The Proxy evaluation's recommendation to Sida

Riddell is outlining two different and complementary means for Sida of improving the quality of the Swedish NGO assistance in terms of enhancing the development impact, called a formal and an informal. The informal encompasses ways of *facilitating and encouraging Swedish NGOs to undertake reviews and expose themselves further to debates within and beyond Sweden about improving development impact...* Riddell notes that this is nothing new in the relationship between Sida and the NGOs, but suggests more work in the field of methodologies to assess impact and how to feed such information back into project and programme design, for example by the way of exposing the Swedish NGOs of how NGOs in other countries undertake such work. In terms of formal instruments, these are related to the process of screening project proposals, the reporting requirements when projects are on-going and the final reporting. The focus on the formal requirements are to a large extent on Sida's Guidelines for NGO support. The study also recommends enhanced transparency and public accountability of the NGO support to a wider audience by issuing an Annual report on the NGO support, and especially the impact of such support. Finally, the Proxy evaluation recommended enhanced information exchange within Sida, between Sida and the NGOs on the development initiatives funded by the NGO division and other development initiatives funded by Sida.

In the survey, the NGOs were asked to comment upon a selected number of Riddell's recommendations to Sida, to what extent they agreed with the study or not, and also to what extent Sida has acted on these recommendations.

Figure 5. NGOs' views of the Proxy evaluation's recommendations to Sida and implementation of these



1: Assist NGOs to assess development impact.
2: Assist NGOs to be exposed to other NGOs' impact analysis
3: Provide best practices in M&E to stimulate learning.
4: Provide funds for int'l networking on methods for M&E.
5: Setting up joint Sida/NGO evaluation working group.
6: Sponsoring Annual Report by main NGOs.
7: Improve internal information sharing in Sida.
8: Improve information sharing between Sida and NGOs.

As noted, a majority of NGOs agree with all the listed recommendations, in fact for most of them there is a complete agreement. The survey again confirms what appears to be a strong demand from the NGO community of an enhanced *technical support function* by Sida in the sense of supporting the NGOs' capacity building, and also an improved *information function* by Sida to create greater transparency in development assistance. This will be further elaborated upon below.

In terms of Sida's implementation of the recommendations, a vast majority of the NGOs perceive little has happened for most of the recommendations, while the position is more mixed as to whether Sida has improved the information function, although a majority see no change.

7.4 Sida's new Guidelines for NGO support

The most elaborated recommendation by Riddell in terms of the focus given in the report, and the one with possibly the most concrete impact, is issuing of new Guidelines for the NGO support. The Proxy evaluation made a clear point of a need to improve on the existing guidelines and provided also detailed recommendations on what such guidelines should contain. According to Sida staff, the study reinforced a felt need towards such new guidelines, and in April 1998, Sida's issued new Guidelines for NGO support – *Anvisningar för bidrag till enskilda organisationers utvecklingsarbete med egeninsats* after an extended process of consultations with the NGOs. The Guidelines, together with the General Conditions for NGO support (*Allmänna villkor för bidrag ur Sidas biståndsanslag till svenska organisationer*) is the most important management instrument for Sida's NGO support. They establish the objectives for such support, the criteria for which NGO projects are supported or not, which organisations that are eligible to apply, the reporting requirements, and the role of the (umbrella) framework organisations in the application, monitoring and reporting system on non-framework NGOs. The potential impact of such Guidelines as normative action by Sida on the direction of the Swedish NGO support is enormous - as directives they might have a total impact of a magnitude no informal tool for change can compete with.

How much did Riddell influence the new Guidelines? Different answers are given by different observers: according to a Sida staff strongly involved in the process, the study facilitated the process to a large extent by paving the way for a better co-operation and consultation process. Another staff member claims that the study made it quite obvious that the old guidelines were obsolete and needed change, thus Riddell triggered an internal work in Sida. However, a representative of an NGO which participated in the work towards the new guidelines, claimed it was difficult to trace any influence by Riddell in that process:

Not once do I remember anyone referring to Riddell in this context. We worked on these guidelines for a long time, but no one ever said, let's see what Riddell has to say on this issue...

These views are not necessarily contradictory. The Proxy evaluation might have triggered the work and created a conducive environment to undertake the reform, but the reform of the guidelines itself might have been very little influenced by the Proxy evaluation.

Comparing the new Guidelines with the Proxy study's specific recommendations of what they should contain, two clearly different philosophies governing the approaches emerge. Riddell *et al* recommend a much more focused approach using poverty as the overriding and mandatory criteria, and other key objectives in Swedish aid such as gender, environment, democracy and sustainability as additional *core criteria*. The guidelines, in the Proxy evaluation's view should be used a) as an instrument to make the NGO projects more focused and related to these development criteria, and b) give Sida a stronger steering tool. The new Guidelines have a somewhat different orientation. While referring to the overall Swedish development objectives and to Sida's four *actions programmes* derived from these objectives as the guiding principles, their emphasis is on institutional co-operation, building organisational competence, etc. expressed in concepts such as *co-operation* with, rather than *aid to*. Poverty is not given any specific focus, nor the other key criteria, besides the overall reference to Swedish development objectives: Riddell *et al* see the Swedish NGOs as instruments towards certain poverty related objectives in which the concept *development by proxy* is well chosen. The guidelines focus on organisational partnership: it is a government support for an *alternative mode of development* fostering civil society as the focus. This difference is essential: it depicts two different philosophies of NGO support, which might be described as an *Anglo-Saxon*, versus a *Scandinavian*. These differences have been commented upon earlier. They also play an important role in determining the potential influence of the study on the NGO system.

Table 16. Coherence of Proxy evaluation and Sida's new guidelines:

Riddell's recommendations	The new Guidelines
Make the poverty criterion more explicit and with higher priority. It should be a mandatory criterion, specifying which groups to be assisted, etc.	The overriding Swedish development objectives apply; no additional focus in the Guidelines on poverty, poverty focus not mandatory.
Making sustainability more explicit and with higher priority. reference.	Sustainable development focusing on local organisation and local participation – no other
NGO projects should be assessed against the core criteria derived from the Swedish development objectives: gender, environment, democracy and sustainability.	Reference to Sida's four action programmes on poverty alleviation; peace, democracy and human rights; gender and environment, but no details on how project would be judged against them.
The core criteria should have a section each in the Guidelines (a check-list).	The LFA system used as guide.

Another major difference between the Proxy study's approach and the Guidelines is the focus on managerial issues. Riddell *et al*, partly instructed so by Sida, avoid discussing administrative issues of Sida, while the Guidelines to a very large extent are management oriented, for example in the discussion of the division of labour between the framework organisations and Sida.

Our conclusion is the Proxy evaluation was an important stage in Sida's management development of the NGO support in stimulating the process and also making the process easier to conduct. It acted as a catalyst. On the other hand, it is difficult to see much influence of the study on subject matters in this process, partly as many of the concepts were so well established anyway; partly as there is a fundamental difference in the underlying concepts of the Riddell's view of NGO co-operation and the one prevailing in Sweden.

Perhaps the most essential influence of the Proxy evaluation was on the implicit objective of changing the relationship between Sida and the NGOs, *bridge-building*, as called by Roger Riddell in his comments to the draft report of *trying to reduce tension between stakeholders*. There is much evidence that the Proxy evaluation, and perhaps more important, the process of consultation associated with the study, in a significant way have contributed to a bridge-building between Sida and the NGOs. As noted earlier, the bridge-building might have gone so far that Sida (SEKA) has problems to respond to the demand for interaction and dialogue.

7.5 The NGOs' perception of the new Guidelines

The survey included questions on these guidelines in terms of the awareness of them and the opinions of the NGOs of their quality versus the old Guidelines. The awareness and the access to these Guidelines is very high four months after they had been issued. Thus, all the framework NGOs have them, and four out of five non frame NGO have also copy of the guidelines.

As indicated in the table below, a majority of both the framework NGOs and non-frame NGOs believe the new Guidelines are better than the old version. However, in terms of the non-frame NGOs every fifth believe they are not an improvement. A majority of both frame and non frame

NGOs believe the new Guidelines will improve on the NGO projects, while every fourth or fifth take a wait and see attitude, and a small minority of the NGOs believe there will be no improvement. The NGOs are much less convinced that the Guidelines will make NGO projects more focused on poverty which was Riddell's major reason for suggesting improvements of the guidelines. Roughly a third of the NGOs believe they will improve poverty focus, a third are uncertain and a third believe they will not.

Table 17. Survey results: NGOs' views of Sida's new Guidelines for NGO support (percent of responses)

	Frame			Non- frame		
	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure
Better than the old version	67	–	33	53	20	27
Will improve NGO projects	67	8	25	60	20	20
Will make projects more focused on poverty	33	25	42	40	27	33

In the survey the NGOs also had the possibility of giving reasons for their positive or negative attitude:

The new Guidelines are considered to be better than the old because...

...we were involved in the preparation of them;

...they are more focused on partnership and organisational development;

...better definition of roles between Sida and the NGOs.

Or, they are considered not to be better because...

...they will increase our paper work (If paper was bread, no one would be starving').

The reasons given for the answers to the second question in table 17, whether the new Guidelines will lead to better projects or not, are the following:

They will lead to better projects because...

...they stress more the linkage between objectives and results and follow up;

...they put more demand on analysis and use of LFA;

...they encourage analysis and critical appraisal before we act;

...the clearer the directives, the easier to meet the demands for us.

They will not lead to better projects because...

...it is just a piece of paper – Sida is getting more and more bureaucratic and technocratic.

Several organisations did not think that the new Guidelines will lead to better poverty focus. The reason for this was also given in the survey, here exemplified by two of the non-framework organisations:

Poverty focus has nothing to do with guidelines for us;

Sweden can't give the solution to other countries' political situation. That is paternalism.

Further comments on the Guidelines by the NGOs

During the personal interviews, Sida's guidelines were discussed at length. The organisations expressed a clearly felt need of guidelines. But it is also clear that not all give them the same importance. The organisations that put the lowest importance on Sida's guidelines considered them to be "a formal thing that will not improve on the NGO projects" or "an ideal, which it's not meant that we shall fulfil". Others see the guidelines almost as a law, which should be followed.

The majority of the interviewed NGOs do not feel that their activities are restricted by Sida's demands. They said that the Guidelines are "only a way of making us define our own goals and work towards them". Thus, these organisations see Sida's guidelines as demands on the technical performance of development work. However, the new guidelines contain stricter rules for applications of funds. The administration for an application is by smaller NGOs considered to be quite bureaucratic, and the main negative aspect of the new Guidelines.

The demands seem to be made for large organisations. We are small, and our partners are small. Our main purpose is cultural exchanges, and the demands make us feel this is bad. There should be different levels for small and big organisations.

Even those who think this seem to understand and approve of the need for the extra paperwork. There is a fear though, that it will lead to development of a new style of management amongst the partner organisations. As there are more demands, some local NGOs will become "fund application specialists" who adapt to the international trends amongst the donors and make money of knowing how applications should be formulated to be accepted.

Co-operation and partnership are key words of the guidelines. However, some organisations claim the guidelines have contradictions as Sida's demands make it more difficult to work as equal partners:

The local ownership is supposed to be done according to Sida's rules, which means that the partner organisation is forced into guidelines from above: it's the opposite of partnership!

We are working as equal partners with our partner organisation. But when we ask them to report and account according to Sida's demands, we put ourselves in a position of authority which is not consistent with a mutual co-operation.

Sida's guidelines also require more performance reporting. One such demand is that the *goals of the development contribution shall be measurable*. While the NGOs understand the need for reporting results, some feel that it will lead to a poorer developmental impact. For example, some NGOs feel that projects will be less innovative as there is a stronger demand on showing results. Several organisations interviewed said that they had avoided trying new ways of working because they couldn't guarantee the result, or because it was too costly to apply for Sida funds for a small test project. Showing results tend also to lead to projects implemented over shorter periods. However, some of the NGOs feel that quick results might be in conflict with sustainable development.

We see development as a process. Therefore we base our projects on participation, capacity building on a long term. This takes time and is difficult to measure and for this reasons Sida's guidelines is a problem.

We can easily measure how many wells have been dug, but can we measure the impact of the inspiration the people in the traditionally patriarchal society got from working together with a Swedish professional woman?

7.6 The NGOs' view of Sida and the framework NGOs as management agents

The survey included a section of more general nature of the perceived relationship between Sida, the framework NGOs and their member NGOs. The NGOs were asked to rate Sida and/or their umbrella organisation on 12 different criteria. These have been grouped in three basic functions: administrative; technical support and general information support. The overall result is presented in table 18:

Table 18. Survey results: The NGOs' rating of the co-operation with Sida/framework organisation (Average ranking on a scale 0-5 as explained below).

Issue	Non-frame org. rating frame org.	Frame org. rating Sida
<i>Administrative function</i>		
1. Efficiency in handling our proposals	4,1	3,7
4. Understanding of the nature of our work	3,4	3,5
5. Administrative efficiency in our relationship	4,0	3,6
6. Accessibility for questions and discussions	4,3	4,1
7. Clearness of the requirements of reporting of our projects	3,8	3,6
11. Flexibility in budget procedures	3,4	3,4
12 Continuity of staff dealing with us	3,8	2,5
<i>Technical support function</i>		
2. Technical support provided to improve our capacity	2,9	2,6
3. Support to increase our capacity to undertake impact evaluations	3,0	2,7
8. Provision of training opportunities for our staff	3,3	2,9
<i>Information function</i>		
9. General information of development issues	3,6	3,5
10. Provision of information of other development work in countries we work in	3,0	2,6
<i>Average</i>	<i>3,5</i>	<i>3,2</i>

Legend: 1=very poor; 2=poor; 3 =moderate; 4=good; 5= excellent

The mean rating of Sida on the twelve criteria used by the framework organisations is *moderate*, using the legend applied in the survey. While surveys tend to attract responses in the middle-field, the overall conclusion is, nevertheless, that much more could be desired. Sida gets the best relative rating by the framework organisations in their capacity as administrators of the NGO support, i.e. in *efficiency in handling NGO proposals*, in *flexibility in budget procedures*, in *efficiency in the general administration of the NGOs*, in *understanding the nature of NGOs' work*, and in *report requirements*. Sida is, in these matters rated as falling between moderate to good. The highest rating of the all criteria is Sida's *accessibility for questions and discussions*, rated in between good and excellent. On the other hand, Sida gets a lower

rating by the framework organisations on what might be labelled *technical support issues*, i.e. in assisting the NGOs to *improve their capacity in general* and to *undertake impact evaluations*, and in *providing training opportunities*. The rating falls on the average between poor and moderate.

In terms of what might be called an *information function*, Sida gets a fairly good rating in providing *general information on development issues*, while *provision of information on other development work in countries of relevance for the NGOs*, is rated as quite poor. The latter problem was also identified by Riddell, and recommendations were provided to Sida.

The lowest rating of all is Sida given in *continuity in staff dealing with the framework organisations*. The high turn-over of staff was mentioned as a problem also in the interviews.

The rating of the non-framework organisations of their (umbrella) frame NGO follows a similar pattern as the frames rating of Sida, i.e. administrative efficiency is better than technical support efficiency, and information function is falling in between. It is noteworthy that the non-frame NGOs overall rate their co-operation with their frame organisation higher than the latter rate the co-operation with Sida.

In general, the NGOs express a keen interest in capacity building through training activities:

we need more training in impact evaluation;

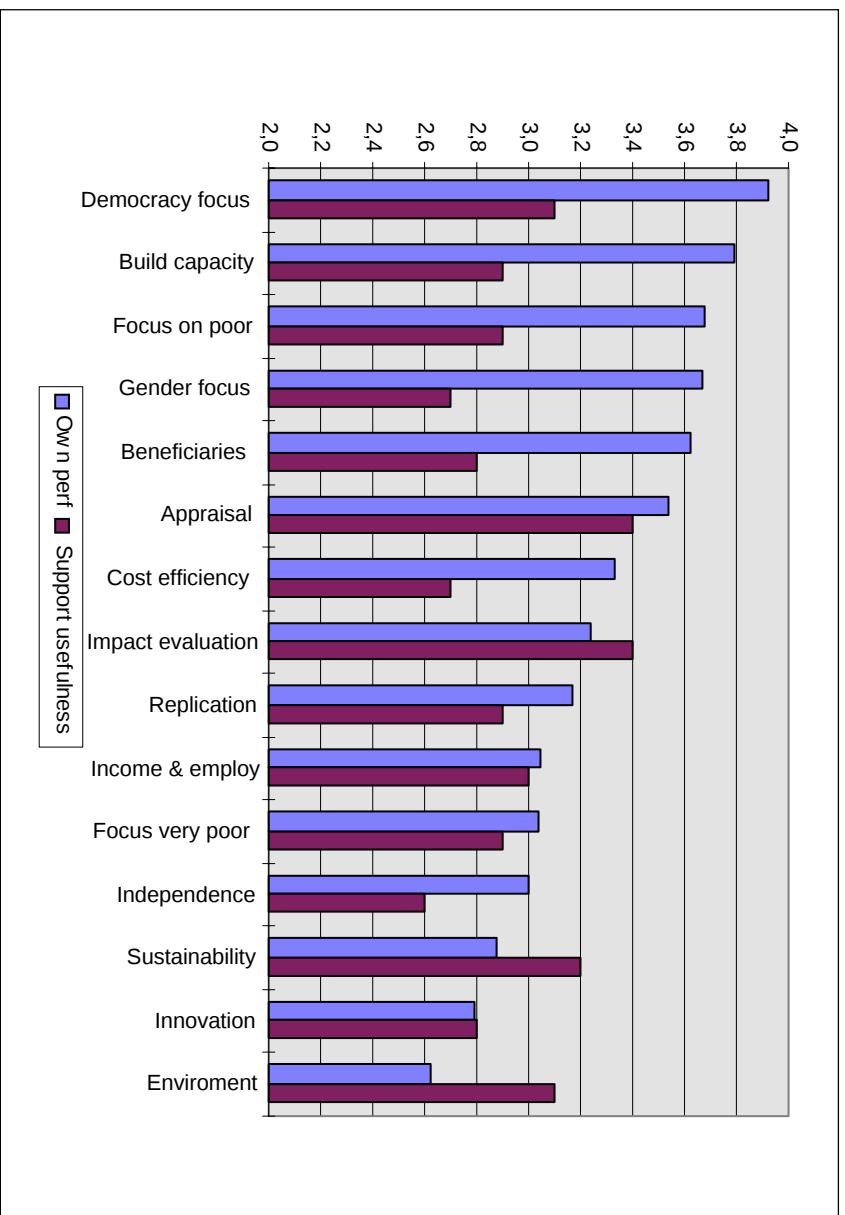
we need more training. Every year there should be courses and seminars in different fields of development, for example LFA. Thereby there would be meetings between NGOs for exchange of experiences...

The findings further reinforce that Sida and/or the key framework NGOs can do much more to satisfy a demand at the first hand for subject matter support and, secondly, to enhance the information exchange.

7.7 The demand for technical support

The survey asked the NGOs to what extent support from Sida or their framework NGO in developing their capacity in respect of the 15 criteria applied would be useful. The results are shown below and placed in relation to the perceived importance of these criteria for the NGOs. The results indicate that such support is deemed important especially for *project cycle management (appraisal and impact monitoring)*, *making projects sustainable*, and in *environmental assessments*. Such support is least requested for *gender issues* and *cost-effectiveness*. Noteworthy is that the areas which the NGOs consider the most important for their work, such *democracy*, *building local capacity*, *beneficiary participation*, the demand for technical support is relatively less, indicating that these are areas the NGOs are quite confident in their own ability.

Figure 6. Survey results: NGOs' assessment of own performance and usefulness of support from Sida/
Framework organisation



8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 The Proxy evaluation's impact on its stakeholders

This study has tried to identify various forms of influences by the Proxy evaluation on different stakeholders in the NGO system. Such influences, as reported by these stakeholders, range from contributions to a discussion and stimulating thoughts, to triggering specific actions. While individuals make up organisations, it is the organisational changes we focus on, rather than influences on individuals. In this context, we make a distinction between three types of influences and changes:

- conceptual
- institutional norms
- organisational actions

We have used the concept of *hierarchies of proxies* to describe the system of organisations acting as intermediaries between the Swedish tax-payer and the poor in developing countries. We have tried to identify influence at the key levels of this 'hierarchy', especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sida, the framework NGOs, the non-frame NGOs, and finally their local counterpart NGOs.

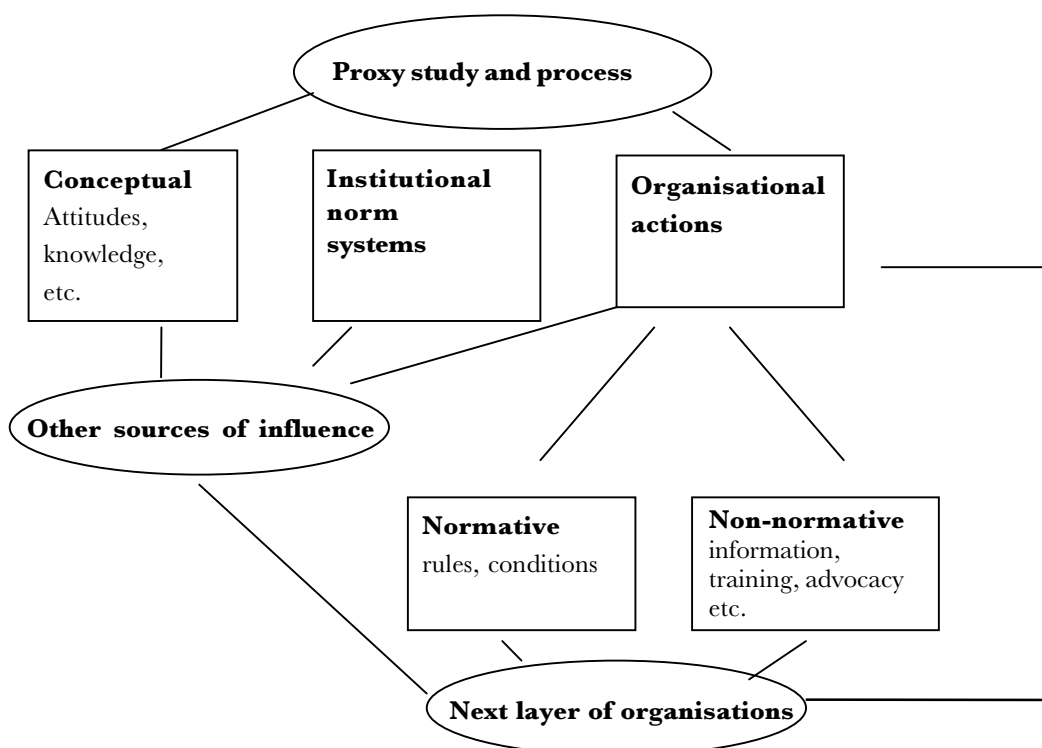
We assume that the system largely functions in such a way that the actions of organisations at the higher level of the hierarchy affect the lower levels. Such actions might be *normative* – for example, Sida issues new guidelines stipulating certain conditions for support – or they might be *voluntary*, or *non-normative* – for example, enhanced exchange of information. Normative actions can be taken at different stages of the hierarchy and might not necessarily be based on a higher level norm:

a Swedish NGO can stipulate to a local partner what the conditions for support should be, without any reference to a norm laid down by Sida or the government.

We also appreciate that there is a reverse process of influence, i.e. lower levels of the organisational system affect higher levels in various non-normative ways in complex interactive webs. In the case of the Proxy evaluation, we believe such reverse influence is limited for inherent reasons. (A study commissioned by Sida, disseminated mainly to frame-NGOs). On the other hand, we believe such a reverse process to be of great importance for the effectiveness of the system as a whole in learning and exploring comparative advantages.

The figure below is a schematic description of the system which governs the discussion in this chapter:

Figure 7. A model of hierarchical influences



The model above is 'value free'. It acts as a framework for determining various types of influences. It doesn't say anything about the value of such influences. There is an implicit assumption underlying the Terms of Reference for this study: that the impact of the Proxy evaluation is positive, the question is rather the degree of such impact. This might be a simplification. Social change is not always for the better. Changes with the purpose of improving do not always lead to that result. While we subscribe to the belief that enhanced information, transparency, knowledge and interaction between various players tends always to be positive, various forms of normative actions might not necessarily have this effect. Thus, normative actions are in particular associated with risks. We have tried to capture such potential effects through the survey and interviews.

Impact at the government level

To judge from our interviews, the Proxy evaluation has had a clear impact at the government level. The independent status of the team, Riddell's personal international status and the ambitious design of the study, contributed to the perception that such information was highly relevant to decision makers at the government level. The effect of such information was reinforced by the near void of feed-back from the field level in a more systematic fashion. Thus, had the NGO support been subject to a similar process of regular impact evaluation as most other development assistance which is provided bilaterally or via international organisations, the relative importance of the Proxy evaluation is likely to have been much less.

The study was no coincidence: It was commissioned at a time when there was a strong demand for information not least due to the rapidly increasing aid flows through these channels. The Proxy evaluation had from its inception the full attention of the decision makers in government. Added to

this was the anxiety described by several officers which was the result of the special character of the NGO support.

The Proxy evaluation has triggered, or contributed to, changes in *institutional norms* in respect of the NGO support within the government. In Sida, the Proxy evaluation seemingly has contributed to a change process in the management of the NGO support, from a re-active approach, to a more pro-active. It was designed for this purpose and it facilitated such change. The policy framework for the NGO support has been changed, reflected, for example, in the new Guidelines. We believe there are changed norms concerning the interaction with the NGOs, as reflected in a policy of involving the NGOs in Sida's country strategy process. There seems also to be an increased degree of transparency, in the sense that more information is provided about the NGO support. The Proxy evaluation has been a factor in such a change process, but of course far from the only factor.

The changes in norms and policies have contributed to changed *organisational action*, both at the ministerial level and in Sida. There seems to be a fairly clear link between the Proxy evaluation, and increased demands from the Ministry on the NGO support, and by Sida's work on the new Guidelines. These actions are normative, hence they will likely have a profound influence on the whole NGO system.

The value of the Proxy evaluation was not so much the conclusions and recommendations that emanated from the study, but the process it comprised. It triggered a considerable interaction between the (framework) NGOs and Sida around basic issues such as impact assessment, perhaps cleared away some uncertainties about ulterior motives, and opened up a more fruitful co-operation on key management instruments such as the new Guidelines.

The effects of normative action on the NGOs

The normative actions by the government and Sida are likely to affect the NGO system to a considerable extent. The most important of these actions is in the form of the new Guidelines. Changes to be triggered by the guidelines are the application of LFA, or the philosophy of LFA, which would force a much stronger structuring of projects in terms of establishing development objectives, activities related to such objectives, placing projects in a broader context and also identifying means for verification of results. The requirements of results reporting, not just financial accounting, are greater, also contributing to what might be called more professional project management at the NGO level. We have tried to assess the NGOs' perception of these Guidelines. For a variety of reasons, they are largely perceived to improve on the NGOs' work. Hence, there is a genuine feeling that these instructions are not forced upon the NGOs, but a collaborative effort. In a medium to long term perspective, such a change process is likely to have a profound effect on the Swedish NGO assistance. However, it must be stressed that it would be wrong to attribute such a change to the Proxy evaluation itself. It certainly played a role as a catalyst in getting the process going, but the direction of the Guidelines are, in our opinion, marginally, if at all affected by Riddell *et al.*

It would also be wrong to describe the change process only in positive terms. While enhanced transparency appears to offer benefits overall, there are risks involved in the more pro-active approach by Sida. Many NGOs have pointed at the risk that innovation and experimentation might suffer as a result of more stringent reporting requirements. There are also risks that the diversity of the Swedish NGO system might suffer from the new style management. The Proxy evaluation was designed using what might be described as fairly conventional development criteria. An important question is whether there are unique features of the NGO support which are poorly captured by such criteria, and, furthermore, whether a pro-active management by Sida risks negating such unique features. One example: the involvement of people-to-people support often in small, soli-

clarity based projects might suffer through increased demands of reporting, project preparation, use of auditing, etc. The increase of the use of aid jargon and English might also discourage certain types of NGOs and NGO projects. If the pro-active management by Sida leads to a process of cloning mini-Sidas, using the same style of projects, same project cycle approach, same criteria, much of the value of the NGO system might be lost. This study reports on an apprehension by the NGOs that some local NGOs are becoming *professional application writers*. This is a dangerous development, which, in our view, the Proxy evaluation neglected.

Impact on the framework NGOs

The conceptual influence of the Proxy evaluation on about half of the Swedish framework NGOs is considerable by their own admission. We believe that this claimed influence is mainly due to the following factors:

- the void of similar analysis in a Swedish context provided much food for thought;
- the international standing of Riddell, not least the international reference material, made the study of interest to the NGOs;
- the consultative and participative process had a value in itself.

We believe that the study has to a certain extent contributed to a change in *institutional norms* in at least some of the NGOs, by acting as a reference and stimuli to an often on-going policy formulation process. These changes are probably less specific on subject matter, and more of general nature to judge from our survey and interviews. The establishment of direct links between the study and such changes is methodologically too complicated and has not been attempted. The lack of recommendations to the NGOs made the study quite general, and hence the tracing of causal relationships very difficult. We believe that the influence might have acted more on a technical level, (such as application of a project cycle approach), than on the orientation of the NGO support as such. In the latter cases, the views of the Proxy evaluation seem too general, and even not relevant in some cases, for the study to have had much of an impact. While the framework NGOs claim to various influences of the Proxy evaluation, we must stress that this is limited to a handful of them.

Impact on the non-framework NGOs

Two change processes are essential when discussing the non-frame NGOs: 1) They are dependent on the normative system established by Sida and by their umbrella organisation. The latter tend to reflect the normative system of Sida, but there might be additional norms, formal or informal, specific to the framework organisations; and 2) the influence either directly by the Proxy evaluation on their conceptualisation, norms and actions, or indirectly through the umbrella NGOs in the form of non-normative actions (training programmes, exchange of information, discussions, etc.).

The study seems to have been a marginal event for most non-framework NGOs. It is noteworthy that, based on the survey, the majority of the Swedish non-framework NGOs have never heard of the study and those which have heard of it, claim it had no influence on them. We have given several reasons for this:

- About half of the framework NGOs claimed the Proxy evaluation had made no, or at most marginal, influence on them. Their motivation for disseminating the results or the study to member organisations is likely to have been low.

- Sida made a considerable attempt to involve the framework NGOs into the whole evaluation process, but the non-framework NGOs were largely excluded from this process. The reason for this exclusion is the decentralisation to the framework NGOs which have an umbrella function and are supposed to act as an intermediary between Sida and the non-frame NGOs. The intermediary role seems to have functioned poorly. Few of the non-framework NGOs claim to have received a copy of the study, or to have been drawn into a discussion of its findings.

Our hypothesis is that the Proxy evaluation has had at best a marginal impact, but more likely no impact on the conceptualisation in the non-framework NGOs. Neither has it had an impact on the norms or their actions in terms of *direct* influence. The exception might be the few NGOs exposed to the case studies, where often there seems to be a significant impact.

In terms of indirect influence through non-normative actions by the umbrella organisations, we have noticed that some of the framework NGOs indeed have taken steps to transmit know-how from the Proxy evaluation, but they appear to be a minority. The level of influence that takes place as a result of broad conceptual changes within the framework NGOs and reflected in the day-to-day informal communication with the NGOs are very difficult to identify.

Impact on the NGOs' local partners

The framework NGOs have gone to some length to disseminate the Proxy evaluation's findings to their local partners in developing countries. According to the survey 40 percent of them claim to have initiated such discussions, and also the case studies from India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe show that the Riddell study is not unknown amongst the local NGOs. The non-framework NGOs claim such a dissemination to a very marginal extent. In the case countries used by the Proxy evaluation, Sida has gone to some length in involving the local NGOs, reflected in the seminars run in these countries. The exception is India.

The following conclusions drawn by the country analysis in this study should be stressed to put the Riddell study in perspective:

- The local NGOs perceive not much transfer of know-how and skills from their Swedish partners (India), but see the process almost in the reverse: the Swedish NGOs tend to be rather passive funders;
- The concept of 'Swedish projects' is often misleading, as there is multi-donor funding of local initiatives; local NGOs have to respond to many donors' different requirements;
- There is an increasing demand for professional project management by the donor community from the NGO community;

Notwithstanding efforts by the Swedish framework NGOs to draw their partners into a discussion of the Proxy evaluation, our hypothesis is that besides the case countries of the Proxy evaluation little has trickled down to the local NGOs in terms of direct influence. In a longer perspective, the normative influence might be more considerable, resulting from changed Guidelines, new policies etc. by the major Swedish NGOs. However, such influence is taking place in an environment with so many different sources of influence that it would be wrong to credit this to the Proxy evaluation only.

8.2 Determinants of impact

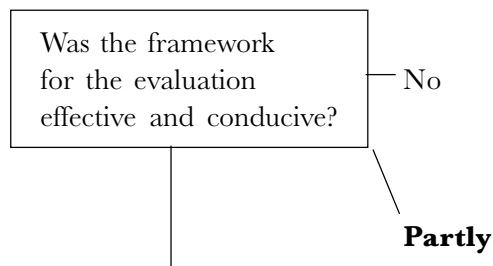
As has been repeatedly discussed in this report, impact of the Proxy evaluation must be seen in the context of the validity and reliability of the findings of the study. Thus, it is the ability of the various stakeholders to correctly judge the findings of the study and its recommendations which matters, not necessarily that stakeholders have acted on the findings or recommendations. As the Proxy evaluation has considerable methodological flaws in our view, impact per se might not be a desirable outcome. Furthermore, as the Proxy evaluation stressed, its findings cannot automatically be generalised to the whole Swedish NGO support as it was based on a very small and non-representative sample.

Some factors have contributed to impacting on the NGOs in a positive sense. The most important such factor is the ambitious consultation- and dissemination process which surrounded the study. This process had several positive features: 1) it created considerable awareness of the study at least amongst the framework NGOs and made the study an active ingredient in their internal policy and strategy formulation process; 2) it spurred a dialogue between NGOs and between NGOs and Sida which had a value beyond the study itself. Contributing to the awareness and discussions was the high profile team with Roger Riddell as team-leader. Rightly or wrongly, the study was given an authoritative mark adding to the attention level.

Factors which had a negative influence, i.e. reduced the impact, was the perceived relevance of the findings, especially amongst the NGOs. A very common answer in the interviews was that the Proxy evaluation's findings were not relevant for the particular NGO interviewed, but possibly concerned others. Thus, limited perceived relevance (for oneself) reduced the likelihood of any change as a result of the study. Another negative factor which reduced the awareness of the study, its use in the internal dialogue and its potential impact is the administrative system for NGO support, i.e. using 'umbrella' framework NGOs as management layer in between Sida and the vast number of Swedish NGOs. This system contributed to a low degree of distribution of the study and its findings within the NGO community. Finally, a negative factor is a difference in organisational culture between NGOs in the sense that some of the larger NGOs increasingly are involved in technical development discussion, while many smaller NGOs feel excluded from such a debate, and tend to perceive such discussions as academic, adding little to the 'practical' work, and therefore largely a waste of time. Adding to this feeling of alienation is the language and jargon used.

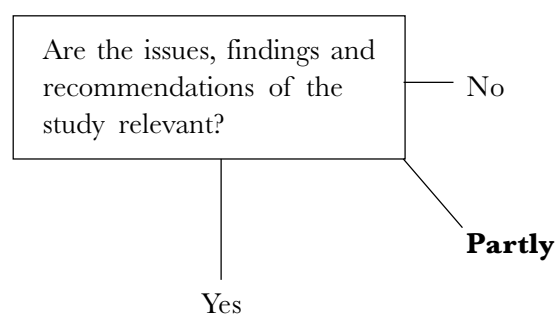
8.3 The effectiveness of the evaluation as a management tool

The model for assessing the effectiveness of the Proxy evaluation as a management tool proposed by this study is revisited below with answers to the various questions raised provided.

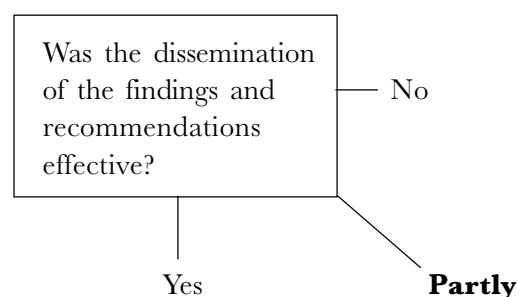


1. The evaluation was given 'high status' as a planned step in a long term process by Sida of building partnership with the NGOs and supporting the NGOs' capacity building especially for the framework NGOs; it was an essential feedback mechanism for a rapidly expanding NGO budget.

2. There was an unusually high degree of involvement of the stakeholders (the framework NGOs) in consultations of how to undertake the study, formulation of the Terms of Reference, etc.
3. The evaluation was a joint effort within Sida of the Evaluation Unit and the Division for NGO support.
4. The study approach combined field assessments of specific projects and a broad policy focused orientation of the findings.
5. The Terms of Reference precluded to a large extent a study that could provide reliable and valid information for the NGO support in more general terms.

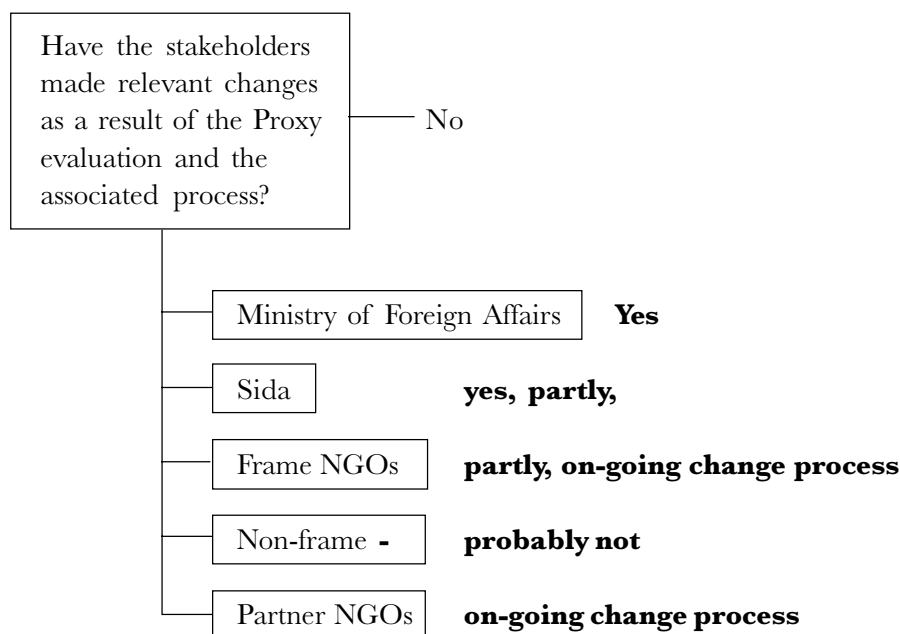


1. The evaluation dealt with the current major issues in development assistance of relevance for any organisation involved. It provided an analytical framework, defined some basic concepts; it identified some weaknesses in the Sida-NGO relationship (for example the Guidelines); it provided an overview of the NGOs' support so far lacking in Sweden;
2. It did not sufficiently take the special character of the Swedish popular movement into account: the complex motives behind the NGO support and the relationship Sida-NGOs; it treated the NGO work in an overly uniform manner (project focus; proxy, etc.). It had some methodological flaws in the establishment of criteria to judge the NGOs' development impact against. The issue of building civil society was not given sufficient attention.

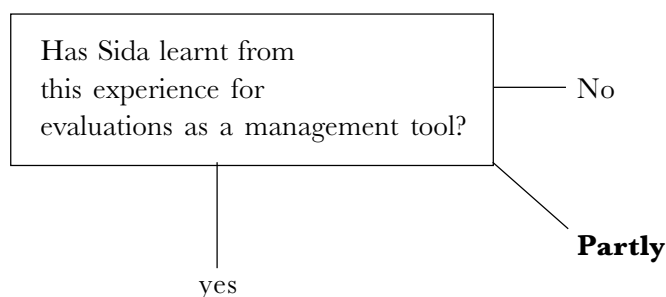


1. The dissemination process of the study was unusually ambitious with high profile seminars, various workshops in the field. There were other follow-up efforts, such as a special study on the report in Sida's Evaluation year book.
2. It largely neglected the majority of the NGOs, the non-framework NGOs in the direct dissemination, and the linkage between the (umbrella) framework NGOs and their client NGOs seem not to have worked properly.

3. The demand for follow-up amongst the NGOs seems not to have been fully satisfied.
4. The dissemination process to the field was also only partial, with a feeling amongst field offices of Swedish NGOs that the study mainly concerned headquarters.



1. Sida has initiated and put into practice a process towards new Guidelines in close co-operation with the NGOs, but the technical support services requested (capacity building in impact evaluation, appraisal, etc. and information exchange) are only partly addressed.
2. The changes at the framework organisational level are very difficult to relate directly to the Proxy evaluation, but a major change process has been on-going in most of them during the 1990s in line with the intention of the Proxy evaluation; the study is likely to have been instrumental in this as it 1) received considerable attention; 2) was conducted in a participative manner; 3) was overall well received and accepted as useful by the framework NGOs; 4) dealt with general issues of relevance to the NGOs.
3. The non-framework NGOs were largely excluded from a process of learning, and if changes are being made which can be directly related to the Proxy, it is mainly through changes in formal rules, such as new guidelines.



1. The formal learning is a part of the current study and was initiated formally in 1997 through an in-house study. The role and importance of participation by stakeholders is likely to have been reinforced earlier. The organisational change since the Proxy evaluation with the creation of new Sida in mid 1995 seems to have caused a certain break or shift in the institutional memory as many new institutional tools and systems were introduced in the new Sida.

8.4 The cost-effectiveness of the Proxy evaluation

With a price of SEK 3 million for the study alone, excluding dissemination activities, the Proxy evaluation was possibly the most expensive evaluation ever carried out by Sida at the time or for that matter since then.²⁹ How can such an investment in information be put in relation to the benefits of the study? Obviously, the benefits in terms of increased awareness, inputs into policy work, stimuli to undertake new guidelines etc. cannot be quantified in monetary terms. However, one way of establishing some relative weight to investments of this nature is to compare the costs to the volume of the NGO support. On an annual basis Sida is channelling funds to the NGOs in the order of SEK 800-900 million, excluding other windows. To this should be added the NGOs own contributions estimated to 20 percent of the total project costs, i.e. the Sida and NGO funds for projects under the NGO window is above SEK 1,000 million per annum. If the Proxy evaluation has contributed to a value added of the Swedish NGO support during one year alone of 0,3 percent in benefit streams of this investment, there is a break-even. As an impact is likely to be for a longer period than one year, this example shows that a value added of the NGO support of even less than 0,1 percent would give a positive cost-benefit ratio. There are considerable simplifications in this calculation, for example the opportunity costs of Sida staff and NGO staff involved in the Proxy evaluation are not included as a cost element. Yet, it illustrates that with such considerable flows of resources, the marginal impact need not be great to make the investment worthwhile.

The cost-efficiency of the Proxy evaluation – whether a similar effect could have been accomplished with less resources, or whether more could have been achieved with the same resources – is also an issue worth considering. The costs of SEK 3 million reflects a very ambitious approach with numerous consultancy weeks, travels, etc. We have no reason to question the efficiency of the consultants in carrying out the task. However, the methodology chosen with a sample of projects which were clearly biased, according to the evaluators, and as a result did not permit generalisations, is a strong sign of low cost-efficiency.

In conclusion, given the volume of the Swedish assistance through the NGOs on an annual basis, the lack of any systematic feed-back on the effectiveness of such assistance, and the large number of decision makers involved at various stages of the process, an evaluation as expensive as the Proxy evaluation can easily have paid good dividends on its investment by stimulating better aid. The methodology chosen, partly necessitated by the Terms of Reference for the study, reduced the potential benefits considerably. On the balance, however, given the debate the study initiated in various fora, we believe the investment was positive. Efficiency could have been further enhanced with a marginal investment in the dissemination, especially by involving a larger number of non-frame NGOs. Greater efficiency could also have been achieved through a simplified means of presenting the results, and perhaps by translating them into more operational guidelines, specific recommendations to the NGOs, etc.

²⁹ No exact information is available, but this is an estimate by a senior official involved and with many years of experience of evaluations in Sida

8.5 Summary of the answers to the questions raised in the Terms of Reference

Below, the answers to the specific questions raised in the ToR are summarised.

Summary of questions in the Terms of Reference	The assessment by the Study in summary
1. What are the effects of the Proxy on discussions, awareness and perceptions in the Swedish NGOs on their development work, strategies and modes of operation, judged against the influence of other sources?	Considerable effect on about half of the framework NGOs, reinforcing already on-going debate. Marginal to no direct effect on non-framework NGOs due to much less awareness of the Proxy evaluation, less involvement in the process and possibly less capacity and/or interest in participate in dialogue due to 'different cultures'.
2. To what extent and in which way has the Proxy evaluation led to changes in policies, strategies, activities and methodologies of the Swedish NGOs in their development assistance funded by Sida's NGO Division, judged against the background of other sources of influence?	Difficult or impossible to establish causal relationships as Proxy evaluation should be seen in a broader change process within the NGOs. The project cycle approach improved over time, including use of LFA. Considerable potential indirect effects due to changes in Sida's directives and guidelines.
3. Do the NGOs see evaluation as an exercise in its own right, or place it within a project cycle framework?	Difficult to generalise. The project cycle approach is gaining spread in the NGO community and is well established in the larger NGOs. Evaluations are becoming more common in NGOs, but this is a process independent of the Proxy evaluation in which Sida has played an important role.
4. What is the impact of the Proxy evaluation on Sida's policies for handling support to the NGOs relative to other sources of influence?	The Proxy evaluation was commissioned as a means for, and contributed to, a longer term change of the relationship with the NGOs by Sida's NGO Division towards a more pro-active approach. The Proxy evaluation also contributed to policy change, mainly reflected in the new Guidelines.
5. Has the Proxy impacted on policy and fund allocation to NGOs by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?	Yes, in the sense that the directives for NGO support is becoming more focused.
6a. What are the lessons of the Proxy evaluation as an instrument or tool for learning and change for Swedish NGOs and for Sida?	A number of lessons: for example, the importance of well defined ToRs; the importance of paying attention to the issue of reliability and validity; the importance of participation by the stakeholders at the various stages of the evaluation; the value of the dissemination process;
b. What are the lessons for future undertakings of similar evaluations?	Better defined T.oR; more critical assessments of the methodology applied and its ability to generate valid and reliable conclusions; even stronger involvement of the stakeholders
7. Was the evaluation planned and conducted with sufficient attention to the varying conditions of the NGOs?	The Proxy evaluation tried to have a wide variety of NGO projects as case material. However, the evaluation had a uniform model for NGO assistance, not sufficiently aware of the cultural framework of Swedish NGOs; the study was also too focused on the framework NGOs; the diversity of the Swedish NGO system very hard to capture in an analysis.
8. Lessons learned and not learned the last few years in the NGO community from the Proxy in approaches, policies	Difficult to answer due to the many influences on the NGOs; overall a greater awareness of placing NGO projects in a broader picture of development objectives. However, most NGOs have not been able to draw any lessons due to unawareness of the evaluation and methodologies?

9. To what extent have the Swedish NGOs raised issues discussed in the Proxy evaluations with partners in the field?	Framework NGOs have to some degree; non-frame very marginally; the Proxy evaluation report as such has not been distributed to the partner NGOs to any extent. The study perceived as a 'head-office- affair'. Local NGOs are exposed to many influences by other donors/NGOs along similar lines of that of the Proxy; any casual effects impossible to establish.
10. To what extent has discussions under 9 above meant raising standards of performance?	There is an on-going process of change in which partly Swedish NGOs play a role, but where also other country NGOs, and not least the local NGOs stimulate change. The direct impact of the Proxy evaluation very marginal, if anything; the view of Swedish NGOs as subject matter specialists is not capturing the reality – the relationship is often passive funding.
11. To what extent do Swedish NGOs perceive they know more about impact of their interventions now than 3 years ago?	There is an on-going process towards improved impact assessment amongst at least the larger NGOs. Impossible to generalise for all NGOs
12. Has the Proxy evaluation lead to a greater communication across and between the Swedish NGOs?	Initially yes, as a result of seminars and workshops by Sida and the NGOs; the sustainability of such interaction is more questionable. However, there is an overall trend towards more interaction on subject matters.
13. To what extent has the four country studies of the Proxy been disseminated, studied, discussed and made use of within the Swedish NGOs and in their partners?	To a great extent, especially in Bolivia where most of the activities took place, possibly less in India. Sida made an unusual effort for local dissemination.
14. What are the factors and circumstances that have determined impact of the Proxy evaluation? For example: a. dissemination b. clarity and accessibility of report c. perceived accuracy of findings and conclusions d. credibility of the study team e. specificity and feasibility of recommendations f. timeliness g. relevance to stakeholders' aim and interests h. participation by stakeholders in	1. Knowledge about the study. This excluded any form of direct impact for the majority of NGOs 2. Perceived relevance. A common view is that the evaluation said little know, and that its findings concerned 'other NGOs' 3. Participation in the evaluation process, both in design and in dissemination 4. The status of the evaluation team 5. Capacity and 'culture' to participate in a process and to absorb the discussion - this created a difference between frame and non frame NGOs, between large and small NGOs 6. In line with the current debate: Proxy brought up many issues being discussed within the NGOs 6. Clarity of the report – language a problem for some, both English and style. Requests for shorter version, easier language and in Swedish
15. To what extent is there an impact of the Proxy evaluation beyond the central headquarters level?	The Proxy has been used at the field offices of larger NGOs; at partner NGOs mostly indirectly as a result of new directives and guidelines,

9. Lessons learnt

9.1 Lessons from the Proxy for evaluations

The importance of good Terms of Reference

T.o.R. are the most critical instrument for a client to steer an evaluation process. It forms the contract between the client and the evaluators, specifies the objective and the questions the client wants to be addressed. Often it also outlines the methodology to be applied. The lessons from the Proxy evaluation (and perhaps also the current study) is that Terms of References are not sufficiently good instruments for steering the evaluations. The most important problem with the Proxy evaluation's T.o.R. was its specification of methodology by pre-determining the countries to be studied. This, together with Sida's lack of a good reporting system of NGO projects, allowed the evaluators to limit their conclusions to the particular projects studied. The degree of generalisation became vague, hence the reliability and validity of the findings for the total NGO project population in question by the evaluators themselves. This reduced to a large extent the relevance of the study in respect of its objectives. At the same time, the findings tend to be used as firm conclusions by various users of the evaluation, not least Sida itself. In a strict sense, the findings should have been expressed as hypotheses to be tested, not as truths about the NGO support. A recommendation to Sida is to reduce the length of its T.o.Rs for evaluations, focus on the objective of the study and make this very clear in the simplest form of language and avoid specifying how the study should be carried out. If the latter is included – unless Sida has worked out the methodology very well and is assured that it is the best possible way to fulfill the objective with a high degree of reliability and validity, Sida undermines its whole process. It is suggested that methodology is left to the evaluators to suggest and subject for scrutiny by Sida, possibly with help of external expertise. A terms of reference for even a major evaluation should be able to fit in one page. In addition to the objectives of the evaluation, Sida needs to indicate its ambition level (expressed in person weeks, budget) and time requirements in order make proposals uniform.

Professional assessments of methodology

The lesson from the Proxy evaluation (and the current study) is that Sida might need a more systematic review of the proposed methodology for an evaluation. This can take place in two stages: 1) in assessing proposals in a bid-process; and 2) in assessing the proposed detailed methodology once a study is being initiated. Sida might need the support of professional expertise in this, combining academic background with experience from evaluations to add what is feasible. Sida might establish a small panel for such expertise to be used systematically. This would also build an institutional know how which today is not strongly systematised.

Assuring valid and reliable results

The most essential aspect of an evaluation is its reliability and validity. This aspect must be made the key criteria in assessment of methodology and also assessment of the results. If unreliable and invalid findings lead to changes and implementation of explicit and implicit recommendations, the chance of counterproductive results are considerable. To judge from the Proxy evaluation, Sida is weak in assessing reliability and validity of evaluations. It is also noteworthy that this aspect of the Proxy evaluation was largely ignored in the Terms of Reference for the current study. A solid foundation of an evaluation should be a pre-requisite before recommendations are put in motions, especially if the latter are normative. Reliability and validity are not matter of opinions. They can only be determined by as scientific review of the process and the methodology of the evaluation as

possible. Before Sida propagate implementation of recommendations, such a test must be made of the basis for these recommendations.

The importance of participation

The difference in awareness, perception and attitude to the Proxy evaluation between frame and non-frame NGOs points towards the importance of ‘participation’ in an evaluation. In simple language, issuing a report is not enough if Sida wants its evaluations to influence various stakeholders. Participation in the process seems to create a considerable ‘value added’ not just by creating awareness of the information available, but allowing interaction, reflection, ownership, etc. There are three forms of participation in an evaluation process: 1) at the stage of design, in writing the Terms of Reference, defining the approach (for example, selection of cases), etc. 2) in the carrying out of the evaluation; and 3) in the dissemination and the feed-back of the findings. The Proxy evaluation had a high profile in particularly the first and last aspects, but a more ‘normal’ participation in the implementation phase. The concept of participation as used here denotes various forms of consultations, but not necessarily an equal sharing of responsibility. In most evaluations, Sida, as the funding agency, has a responsibility of accountability which not easily can be shared. Nevertheless, a high degree of involvement of various stakeholders at the design stage will increase the likelihood that these stakeholders will not reject the findings, it will add technical information essential for the evaluation process, and will add value by stimulate the thinking around the concepts. In the second stage involvement by stakeholders is often a necessity in order for consultants to carry out the task. A high degree of transparency is essential as it will reduce the risk of rejection of the findings, and will also act as corrective to faults in the process.

The study has shown that involvement of the stakeholders in the dissemination process is essential. While the Proxy evaluation was, in our view, unusually ambitious in this respect, the study indicates that there is a demand for even more activities of such nature.

The value of interacting with the stakeholders in an evaluation is not news to Sida. In Sida’s Evaluation Manual the participatory aspect is stressed, and various operational tools are suggested. A hypothesis from the study is that the participation and active dissemination is not just a matter of ‘getting the message across’. The survey of the NGOs revealed that Riddell’s findings is not shared of a majority of the NGOs – yet the study was perceived as quite useful. Thus, the value of the Riddell study was not that it revealed some major truths or findings of the Swedish NGO system, but that it took place at all, and that the event was used by Sida to stimulate interaction and debate.

An evaluation should stimulate learning

We are not convinced that the Proxy evaluation added much factual information of how the Swedish NGO support functions and its development impact, at least not to the NGOs. Besides based on an admittedly small sample of NGO projects, the methodology applied prevented generalisation of findings, the statements in the final report were not always substantiated by case materials, and the cases not entirely following the same methodology, and the study contained no recommendations to the NGOs which required a more active analysis of the NGOs to draw potential conclusions for policy and programming. Also, , the study was based on certain conceptions which made the picture of the NGO support less accurate. As stressed earlier, we are not arguing that the evaluation was sub-standard: similar views can be given on any evaluation of such a complex issue as development undertaken under the common time constraints of evaluations. It rather makes the point that in complex learning processes, triggering the debate, opening up discussions and stimulate interaction between different stakeholders around key issues are as essential, and sometimes possibly more essential, for the outcome as providing factual information about the issue at stake.

A lesson for Sida in this context is to steer the dissemination process towards *learning*, rather than getting the different *views of an audit*. On the one hand, the objects for an evaluation need to be given ample opportunity to express their views, preferably in written form for future references. On the other hand, it is essential that the process is carried one step further, towards constructive learning. The forms of dissemination seminars, their agenda, the chairmanship, the form of the presentation, the organisations/persons invited, etc. are all inputs that might govern such a process in one direction or the other.

Sida has established rules of conduct for undertaking evaluation, most notably reflected in *Evaluation Manual for Sida*. The participatory aspect, and the essence of feed-back, are well laid out in this manual with concrete suggestions for implementation. It would, nevertheless, be useful for Sida to review how evaluations in practice are disseminated to determine what are good conditions for creating effect. As the dissemination to a large extent rests with the unit in the organisation responsible for the programme, such 'best practices' might be quite useful.

Making analysis and dissemination two separate functions

Sida might consider dividing up the evaluation process in two distinct phases: 1) undertaking the analysis and preparing a report; and 2) the process to disseminate the results and stimulate learning. While the Proxy evaluation to some extent is an exception, when an evaluation comes to presenting the results, getting feed-back of the results, and stimulate discussion and learning from the exercise a degree of exhaustion has generally taken place. The consultants feel they have done the work they have been paid for, and Sida staff, often involved in numerous tasks, feel the work has been done as well. The report is the concrete output. A recommendation is that Sida considers evaluation as a two step process with two different budgets and two different Terms of References. Consultants might be requested to come up with a proposal for the dissemination process, propose how they see the most effective means of stimulating the debate, additional ways of presenting the results, etc. Preferably, the second phase is decided after the first, when the quality and the orientation of the study is known.

Enhancing the dissemination

A general lesson from the Proxy evaluation is that Sida could do much more in disseminating results and generate a debate around such endeavours. To some extent it is a matter of publicity: to make the existence of the report known to as wide (relevant) audience as possible. The new Sida has introduced means for this, for example its Evaluation Newsletters. Recent years, the explosive development of the Internet gives also new opportunities, partly already explored by Sida. The additional cost for such publicity is marginal as compared to the cost of undertaking the study. While evaluation results generally are presented in conventional media, such as a report, it might be worthwhile to explore other media, for example the Internet, videos and slides, especially for dissemination to wider audiences, for example in recipient countries.

Making the political process explicit

Evaluations are often 'political' processes in the sense that they take place in a particular context of stakeholder interests, and not seldom with a hidden, overriding agenda of creating change amongst such stakeholders. The Proxy evaluation had apparently such a 'political' agenda, both in the sense of wanting to create an enhanced dialogue between Sida and the NGOs - bridge building in Roger Riddell's words, and by questioning the assumed effectiveness of the NGO support in a context when such support had grown rapidly out of political interests. If possible, such 'hidden' agendas should be spelled out in Terms of References, for example by putting the study in a broader context (sometimes done in 'Background' descriptions). Such hidden agendas risk to steer the evalua-

tion in the sense that the evaluators know what the client wants, and the explicitness is therefore essential in order to test objectivity.

Widening the participation and the audience

To judge from the Proxy evaluation, Sida should try to involve a broader range of stakeholders than those most immediate and not rely on the functioning of a hierarchy of organisations. Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders adds to the discussions besides increases the likely reach of the dissemination process. The integrated embassies are useful institutions for such dissemination at the field level. However, their active involvement requires probably early participation of them in the design stage.

Selection of teams

There is an inherent merit to have a joint Swedish - foreign team undertaking major evaluations. The foreign inputs would likely add to a higher degree of impartiality, add an international perspective, while the 'Swedish' inputs would provide the specific cultural and linguistic dimensions. However, there is also a risk element: it is essential to have a shared responsibility to achieve these values.

Upgrade the recording system

At the time the Proxy evaluation was undertaken, Sida's recording system of the distribution of evaluation reports was non-functional. A system which records who gets the reports, who requests new copies, and in general a follow up system of the distribution might enhance the effectiveness of the dissemination. Using currently technologies, the dissemination and the dialogue with stakeholders might be enhanced through the use of Internet.

Lessons for evaluations of evaluations

Should Sida undertake similar assessments of evaluations as the current one, these should preferably be conducted simultaneously with the evaluation itself. Only then can a reliable base line be established (to measure any change against), and tracing effects and impact would be simplified by direct interaction with the key participants. It would also allow more accurate tracing of operational changes.

Respond to the interest created by an evaluation

In general, a participative evaluation is likely to trigger demand for follow up activities, further studies, training activities, etc. An essential means to enhance the effectiveness of evaluations as a management tool for change is to act on and respond to such stimuli. On the other hand, if such demand from stakeholders is not met, the risk is that the participants might be discouraged in the sense that not only an opportunity was lost, but the attitude towards Sida as a knowledge based service organisation is impacted negatively. In view of Sida's general limited administrative capacity, this risk is considerable. A means to overcome this might be to plan for actions already at the design stage of an evaluation. I.e. allocate a budget for follow up activities, allocation of responsibility for follow up might be suggested, etc.

9.2 Learning for the management of NGO support

The quest for knowledge in the NGO system

One theme in this report emanating from the survey and interviews, and also the field work, is the quest for knowledge in the NGO sector. It could be argued that the NGOs are becoming increasingly professional aid organisations with a need for learning, developing their skills and methods, and

to interact with other players in this field. This quest for knowledge is probably one reason why the Proxy evaluation was appreciated by the NGOs that actively were involved in the process of it. The study has indicated that the NGOs welcome broad assessments such as the Proxy evaluation as stimuli for thought and providing a *helicopter view* of their activities. The study has also identified certain areas where know how is particularly requested. Based on the survey, know how in project cycle management, such appraisal, monitoring and evaluation seem of high priority, and also how to stimulate income and employment and issues of how to enhance financial sustainability. While Sida seems to have clear role to play in respect of the broader assessment, there are different opinions who should act as resource centres for specific skills development.

Judging the NGOs on their own merit

The Proxy evaluation applied in many fashion a conventional approach to the assessment of the NGOs' work. It neglected, or paid limited attention to, what supposedly is the strength of the NGOs versus other players in the development assistance field: building civil society through a decentralised process of solidarity between people. The effectiveness of the NGOs in this respect is still largely unknown, and generally based on impressions. It is recommended that Sida, jointly with the NGOs, undertake a thematic assessment of the effectiveness of the Swedish NGOs in this respect. Such an assessment should not only provide feed-back for the NGOs own capacity development, but also provide learning to Sida in its role in a new aid environment as further elaborated below.

The quest for interaction with Sida

There dualism in both Sida's and the NGOs' views of the interaction, on the one hand, a respect for, and desire to maintain autonomy, i.e. *independence*, and on the other hand, a need for interaction, participation and exchange, i.e. *interdependence*. We believe the balance is tilted towards independence, and more is to be gained on *interdependence*. The basis for this should be mutual respect, partnership, learning from one another, utilising the different players comparative strengths, and a search for synergy in co-operation. We believe, the results of the survey and the interviews in this study expresses a clear demand, and gives a clear mandate from the NGOs towards such interaction. Sida is not perceived as *big, bad government*, but as an organisation that have an open mind, and a willingness to provide support and be flexible. The problem is Sida's capacity to engage in such interaction from a pure constraint in time. This limited capacity reduces in many ways the quality of the NGO support. As there are limited efforts to put various development initiatives into a broader framework, the NGO support risk of being much too fragmented, myopic in the sense that it spread here and there in micro projects that are drowned in the immense needs of the recipient countries. Co-ordination, seeking synergy between different activities and players, tailor-making projects that they fit into larger sector programmes, or using NGOs as partners in such programmes is not jeopardising NGO autonomy and freedom to pursue their own missions, but it might add to overall development effectiveness. It might also add to the NGOs professionalism, their interaction with a broader spectrum of the society in the recipient country, stimulate their innovation to address critical problems, and so on. Stimulating this type of interaction doesn't require normative means: it would probably grow through various means of sharing information, meetings around key issues, transparency of what everyone is doing, respectful learning from one another.

Adapting to a new aid environment

The Swedish development assistance is going through a continuous change process which has a bearing on the NGOs. Some of these trends are:

- increased use of the private sector, including local NGOs and other civic society forces in areas where traditionally government was a key, or sole player;

- decentralisation of governance, service delivery etc.;
- increased attention to issues of governance, including broad social institutions such as norms and value system, the legal framework, democracy, etc.;
- more streamlined assistance, on fewer sectors, sector programme orientation, linked to country strategy formulations, etc.;
- more 'strategic' inputs with a profile of 'Swedish' development assistance.

There are consequences of this on the NGOs. First, the Swedish NGOs are becoming – or should become – more important players as intermediaries between the official development assistance and civil society in recipient countries. This would call for a stronger integration of the NGOs in Sida's broader work, which, in its turn, also would have various effects on the NGO activities. There is a need for a stronger partnership between Sida and the NGOs in the overall development assistance. Sida, which traditionally mainly has operated through government agencies, needs to learn from the NGOs of effective ways of dealing with the civil society. The NGOs might, in their turn need to learn how their projects, programmes and activities' can be scaled up, turned into more national programmes with or without linkage to governments.

The NGOs have a stronger orientation on decentralised solutions and institutions than Sida traditionally, which generally has operated through central organisations. In a broad process towards decentralisation where bodies such as municipalities, local grass root organisations, churches, etc. tend to play more important roles in service delivery, a partnership with Swedish NGOs is required in which the NGOs can provide know how in how local level organisations function and best can be supported; while Sida can provide the competence of looking at broader systems, for example how various local initiatives can be integrated into a nation wide service programme. In sectors such as health and education where such trends of decentralisation are strong, and where the civic society and the market play more important roles, such partnership seems fertile. A consequence of this is that autonomous NGO activities might need to be integrated into more comprehensive programmes.

Sida's drive towards sector programme support has a bearing on the NGOs. Such sector programmes, especially if they include non-government providers, would affect, or draw upon, the NGOs.

Governance in a broad sense includes areas where NGOs of tradition are strong. The obvious case is in the field of democratic institutions and human rights, but there are less obvious cases such as the institutions of trade unions and the relationship between employers and employees; the rights of children, etc. The complex dynamic forces how social institutions are formed and changed as an interplay between government, the civic society, and other players in society is not well known, and a partnership between NGOs and Sida in this field towards more effective means of supporting good governance seem opportune.

The NGO window is, and could possibly be better used as, a source of innovation. Its decentralised nature, high degree of autonomy for the NGOs, its diversity and pluralism, and dependence on NGOs' dedication and involvement, are all strong ingredients conducive for innovation. As Sida increasingly is looking for interventions that makes a difference, the NGOs is such a source. But innovation requires freedom to innovate, try and fail and is thus sensitive to too much of formalised requirements. Meaningful innovation also requires using the innovations. Sida needs to more systematically screen the experiences by the NGOs for such potentially replicable innovations.

ANNEX 1: Terms of reference for the study

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STUDY

Sida
Department for Evaluation
and Internal Audit (UTV)

24 April 1998

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

FOR

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE 1994 EVALUATION "PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT BY PROXY - AN EVALUATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO SWEDISH NGOs"

A. Background

Assessing the effects or impact of evaluations is an important part of the feedback and learning process, i.e. learning for the development of more effective aid interventions, but also in order to improve on evaluation as an instrument of change. Impact assessments, especially of large and complex evaluations, have therefore been made a regular part of Sida-UTV's annual evaluation plan.

A study to determine the effects of the above particular evaluation, henceforth referred to as the Proxy Evaluation, has been part of UTV's plan since 1997. The study was initiated late last year with an inquiry, the result of which is a focal part of the attached preparatory paper.

For background to the study and these terms of reference, see the annexed preparatory paper (Annex 1). As explained, this pre-study has served as an input in preparing these terms of reference and should be seen as a guide to them.

B. Purpose and use

The purpose of doing this study is to further promote the learning process toward improved accountability, effectiveness and impact of Swedish NGO development assistance funded by Sida.

To this end, the study shall distinguish between three areas of learning: development processes and programming, evaluation methodology, and the performance of the relevant Swedish NGOs and Sida. The study is meant to be used to initiate or further guide discussions within and between NGOs and Sida in these areas, and in the process enhance communication, common understanding and learning.

C. Scope of study

The study is tasked to cover the following:

(i) to discuss and assess the effect the Proxy Evaluation has had on discussions, awareness and perceptions in the Swedish NGO community regarding the role and impact of their development work and the need felt for changes in strategies and ways of working (*'conceptual impact'*). The impact of the Evaluation in this respect shall be judged against the background of other sources of influence in recent years.

Assessments of changes in perceptions and learning should distinguish between changes at individual and institutional levels;

(ii) to determine and assess in what ways and areas, and to what extent the Proxy Evaluation has lead to actual changes in the policies, strategies, activities and methodologies of Swedish NGOs in the development assistance they administer with funds appropriated by Sida's NGO Division (*'operational impact'*). The impact of this particular evaluation during the past three years is, again, to be judged against the background of other influences.

Specifically under this item, the study should try and determine to what extent NGOs see evaluation as an exercise in its own right or work to place it within a framework of PMES (Project appraisal, Monitoring and Evaluation System);

(iii) to make an assessment of the impact of the Proxy Evaluation, relative to other influences, on Sida's policies for and way of handling the assistance Sida channels through Swedish NGOs. Has the Evaluation in any way impacted on the policy and fund allocation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

(iv) to identify, discuss and analyse factors, circumstances and processes that, positively or negatively, have determined the impact of the Evaluation under (i) and (ii);

(v) to assess the Proxy Evaluation as an instrument or tool for learning and change, for Swedish NGOs and for Sida, critically considering the process of planning and producing it, the reporting from it, feedback and how the report has been used. Also, to attempt to draw conclusions and discuss implications or prospective consequences relevant to the future undertaking of similar evaluation projects.

Questions addressed under this item should include: Was the evaluation planned and conducted with sufficient consideration and adaption to the varying conditions for the NGOs under study?

(vi) to review and discuss developments in approaches, policies and methodologies during the last three years in the relevant Swedish NGO community, highlighting lessons learned and not learned from the Proxy Evaluation, and to make any recommendations as to appropriate lines of action on the part of NGOs and Sida respectively, in addressing issues or needs that require further attention.

It is assumed that to discuss and assess, in any meaningful way, the impact or effects of the Proxy Evaluation on the perceptions and activities of partner and counterpart organizations in project countries ('field level impact') would require a separate, additional impact study. What the planned study can and should attempt, however, is

(vii) to find out the extent to which Swedish NGOs in their deliberations with partner and counterpart organizations in the field, have raised issues such as those highlighted in the Proxy report, and to what extent this has also meant raising standards of performance; and

(viii) to assess the extent to which Swedish NGOs perceive they now know more about the impact of their interventions than three years ago;

(ix) finally, to determine the extent to which the Proxy Evaluation has lead to any greater level of communication across and between Swedish NGOs; and, in this connection, to determine the extent to which the four country studies have been disseminated/studied, discussed and made use of within the Swedish NGO community and its partners in 'the field'.

D. Study Design and Methodology. Implementation requirements

1. As stated in the Tender Invitation, submitted tenders must include four elements as below, and will be judged against these in the following order of priority:

- (i) the Consultant's *interpretation* of the assignment, based on the above background, purpose and scope;
- (ii) a presentation of the professional qualifications of the proposed *study team*;
- (iii) a *basic design and methodology* for how the Consultant intends to carry out the study;
- (iv) *timeplan and budgeted cost*, with budget submitted under separate cover.

2. Tenders should be based on a need for the Consultant of maximum *ten (10) person weeks*, including the time required to prepare the inception report (point 4 below) and including time for completing the report.
3. The budget shall include, in a separate budgetline, the cost of a *seminar* which is to take place in Stockholm immediately after the publication of the report, organized and facilitated by the Consultant, at which the study is to be presented to concerned actors and stakeholders and other interested parties. Time required for organizing this seminar is *not* to be included in the total time given for carrying out the study (point 2 above).
4. The selected Consultant is asked to begin the assignment by preparing an *inception report* elaborating on the basic design and plan for the study. After discussion with and approval by Sida-UTV, the Consultant shall begin to carry out the study as soon as possible.
5. The study shall be *based on* a review of existing documentation relevant to the purpose and scope of the study, and on interviews with organizations and stakeholders.
6. The study design should specify the types of *determinants of evaluation impact* (asked for in item iv under Scope above) that the Consultant believes should be investigated. Following are some of the factors that might be relevant for consideration: dissemination; clarity and accessibility of report; perceived accuracy of findings and conclusions; credibility of study team; specificity and feasibility of recommendations; timeliness; relevance to stakeholder aims and interests; and, participation of stakeholders in earlier stages of the evaluation process.
7. In assessing the 'conceptual' and 'operational' impacts asked for under items (i) and (ii) under scope above, the study must take care to consider the *diversity of the NGOs* studied and their varying conditions: differences in background, perception of role, diversity of operations, organizational structure, capacity/capabilities etc. The study must also find ways of distinguishing between *different levels of impact in the respective organizations*: to what extent are we seeing any identified impact beyond the central (headquarter) level?
8. A *participatory approach* is being applied in the planning and performing of this study. The 'framework' NGOs and Sida's NGO Division have been interviewed in preparing the attached pre-study. They have also been invited to submit comments to a draft version of these terms of reference for the study. Finally they will be given opportunity to submit comments on a first draft of the Consultant's report (see below under 'Reporting').
9. The study is *external* in the sense that while the Consultant is obliged to give full and fair consideration to substantive comments and views presented by all concerned during the entire process, but is alone responsible for the content of the final report.

E. Study Team, qualifications

The study is commissioned by Sida-UTV. The team assigned to carry out the study should have within it qualifications, knowledge and experience appropriate to the purpose and scope of the study, including:

- familiarity with Swedish NGOs working with development assistance, this community's working relation to Sida, and fluency in the Swedish language;
- familiarity with recent NGO community developments in other countries, together with good knowledge of the NGO community internationally and the challenges it is facing, including the wider literature and work on the PMES framework.

Experience from studies of evaluation impact is seen as an advantage. Finally, the team leader, identified in the presentation of the team, must have experience and competence in team leadership for evaluations.

Depending on its composition, the team is thought to consist of 2-3 people.

F. Reporting and Timing

1. A *first draft* of the full report shall be circulated for consideration, to the thirteen 'framework' NGOs, Sida's NGO Division, Sida's internal network on NGO collaboration, Sida-UTV, any embassies in countries touched by the study, and all who up to then have contributed in any way to the study, giving all these entities three (3) weeks to submit their comments.

The report must include a presentation of the process in drawing up the study design and choosing methodology. It shall also list all contributors to the study (excepting those that have opted for anonymity), and include a proposed outline for a presentation and feedback seminar following the publication of the report (see above under D:3).

2. Following the three week circulation, the Consultant shall present Sida-UTV with a *final draft* of the report. UTV will comment this second version within two weeks of receiving it, after which the Consultant will prepare the *final report*.

The *final report* is to be delivered by the Consultant to Sida-UTV *no later than 16 November 1998*. The presentation seminar is to be organized latest on 30 November.

3. The report shall be authored in English (only) and should not exceed 50 pages, excluding any annexes. Format and outline of the report shall follow, as

closely as is feasible, the guidelines in *Sida Evaluation Report - a Standardized Format* (see Annex 2). The report shall be typed on a word processor, using Word 6.0 as software. Later editions of this software may also be used (e.g Word 7, Word for Windows 95 or 97). To facilitate editing and printing the authors shall supply Sida with a disc, containing one file only.

The assignment also includes the production of a Newsletter summary, having a format adapted to the guidelines in *Sida Evaluations Newsletter- Guidelines for Evaluation Managers and Consultants* (Annex 3), and the completion of *Sida Evaluations Data Work Sheet* (Annex 4). The separate Newsletter summary and a completed Data Work Sheet shall be submitted to Sida-UTV along with the final report.

ANNEX 2: The framework organisations

NAME OF ORGANISATION	PURPOSE (all windows 1997) SEK mill. *	APPR. Sida BUDGET	UMBRELLA FUNCTION
Afrikagrupperna <i>The Africa Groups</i>	Solidarity organisation for Southern Africa	34 (28)	No
Diakonia <i>Free Church Aid</i>	Umbrella organisation of the Swedish Free Churches for development assistance	166 (59)	Yes – 7 members
Forum Syd <i>Swedish NGO Centre for Development Co-operation</i>	Umbrella organisation for various NGOs established on the initiative of Sida	111 (110)	Yes – about 200 NGOs
LO/TCO Biståndsnämnd <i>LO/TCO Council of International Trade Union Co-operation</i>	Umbrella organisation for the Swedish trade unions LO and TCO for development assistance	65 (65)	Yes – LO and TCO organisations
Olof Palme International Centre	Umbrella organisation for Swedish Social Democratic party and its related political and labour organisations for support to developing countries	61 (48)	Yes – 34 co-operating organisations, which in their turn have branches
PMU Interlife	Umbrella organisation for the Swedish Pentecostal churches for development assistance	144 (104)	Yes – about 50 active churches, but in theory 500
Rädda Barnen <i>Save the Children</i>	Independent organisation working for the rights of children	104 (100)	No
SHIA <i>Swedish Organisation of Handicapped International Aid Foundation</i>	Umbrella organisation for unions of disabled for development assistance	26 (26)	Yes – 16 member unions
Svenska Kyrkans Stiftelse för Rikskyrklig Verksamhet (SFRV)	Umbrella organisation for three Swedish churches for development assistance	111 (65)	Yes – Lutheran Help; Church of Sweden Mission; and Swedish Evangelical Mission
Svenska Missionsrådet Swedish Mission Council	Umbrella organisation for Swedish church missions for development assistance	152 (145)	Yes – 25 member organisations
Svenska Röda Korset Swedish Red Cross	One of 170 national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies working for prevention and alleviation of human suffering	103 (45)	No
Utan Gränser/Swedish Co-operative Centre	Umbrella organisation for the Swedish co-operative movement for development assistance	58 (57)	No
Utbildning för Biståndsverksamhet (UBV) <i>Training for Development Assistance</i>	Independent organisation for volunteers and information activities work in Latin America	14 (14)	No

* Figure in brackets, Sida support via SEKA (NGO window)

ANNEX 3: Persons interviewed

Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Hans Magnusson, special advisor, International Co-operation Division

Anita Nordwall, former staff of the NGO Division (NGO Sekretariatet)

Sida

Eva Asplund, former head of SEO

Magnus Lindell, head of NGO Division

Annika Idemalm, former staff Evaluation unit

Lars Bellander, former staff of SEO

Claes Bennedich, UTV

Margareta Ström, former assistant of the Evaluation Unit

Swedish NGOs

Eva Almered, Director,

Afrikagrupperna

Karin Bengtsson, administrator,

Individuell Människohjälp

Camila Buzaglo, International Secretary

S-kvinnor

Hélène Cassemar Jeansson, Program Officer,

Swedish Co-operative Centre/ Utan Gränser

Sven Eckerdahl, Southern Africa Secretary,

Svenska Kyrkans Stiftelse för Rikskyrklig Verksamhet

Ninni Erlandsson, Information

Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh

Ove Gustafsson, Chairman South Africa Group,

Pingstkyrkan, Uppsala

Birgitta Göransson, Co-ordinator,

Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh

Ragnar Hallgren, Chairman of the Board

Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh

Gunnar Hellberg, Administrative Co-ordinator

SHIA

Peter Hjukström, Secretary General,

Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

Jan Hodann, Program Manager,

The Olof Palme International Centre

Stefan Holmström, Secretary General

Individuell Människohjälp

Bert Jakobsson, Major,
Salvation Army

Göran Johansson, Financial Controller
Swedish Co-operative Centre/ Utan Gränser

Bernt Jonsson, Director,
Life and Peace Institute

Gert Lind
Svenska Missionsförbundet

Cecilia Lindblom, Chairman,
Vänortsföreningen Lund-Léon

Marisol Lopez, Secretary General
UBV, Utbildning för Biståndsverksamhet

Rigmor Mjörnell, Projects Director Africa and the Caribbean
LO/TCO Biståndsnämnd

Leif Newman, Senior Administrator for International Co-ordination
Diakonia

Lars-Erik Palm, International Department
Save the Children

Anneli Peltonemi, Accompanying Volunteer
Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh

Svante Sandberg, Secretary General
Forum Syd

Olof Sandkull, Volunteer
Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh

Carl-Michael Simon, Chairman
Utrikespolitiska Föreningen, Lund

Birgitta Skageborg, Assistant at the International Secretariat
Sveriges Riksidrottsförbund

Roland Stenlund
PMU

Lars Strandell
Svenska Kyrkans Stiftelse för Rikskyrklig Verksamhet

Birgitta Strömblad, Program Manager
The Olof Palme International Centre

Gunnar Swahn, Missionary Secretary
Filadelfiakyrkan Stockholm

Christina Tillö, Handläggare
Svalorna Latinamerika

Cecilia Vilhelmsson, Scholarship administrator
Utrikespolitiska Föreningen, Lund

Anders Ölund, Co-ordinator for Environmental Issues and Sustainable Agriculture,
Svenska Kyrkans Stiftelse för Riksskyrklig Verksamhet

Indian NGOs

Mrs Bose
Society for Remedial Education
Calcutta

Mrs. Andal Damodaran, Honorary General Secretary
Indian Council for Child Welfare
Tamil Nadu

Rev. Steven C. David, Moderator
Hindustani Covenant Church
Pune

Mr. Dennis Gardner, Chief Coordinator
Suvarta Alliance Ministries
Nandurbar

Mr. Mogens Jeppesen, Director
Lutheran World Service (India)
Calcutta

Mr. J.L. Kaul, Secretary General
All India Confederation of the Blind
Delhi

Mr. Avdhash Kaushal, Director
Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK)
Dehra Dun

Mr. S. Martine, Secretary
Village Community Development Society
Tamil Nadu

Mr. V. Nadesan, Correspondent
Tom S. Bavin Trust
Tamil Nadu

Mr. Peter Neidenberger, Project co-ordinator
TELC – Education Development Project
Tamil Nadu

Mrs. Mary Ratnam, Thiruppattur Rural Uplift Project Association (TRUPA)
Tamil Nadu

Mr. M.L. Alphonse Raj, Executive Secretary
Island Trust
Tamil Nadu

Mr. Pratim Roy, Coordinator
Keystone Foundation
Tamil Nadu

Mr. Selwyn
Methodist Church of India
Mumbai

Commissioner T.G. Sundaram, Director
The Salvation Army India
Western Territory, Mumbai

Swedish Embassy in India

Mr. Urban Andersson, Economist, Development Cooperation Division
Mr. Christer Holtsberg, Counsellor and Head of Development Cooperation
Ms Marie Sollander, Political Counsellor

ANNEX 4: Documents consulted

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“UBVs politiska plattform”, UBV.

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ANNEX 5: The NGO questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION (All the questions concern your organisation, not you personally)
 (If you find that you do not have enough space on this questionnaire for comments, you are welcome to provide them on a separate sheet of paper with reference to the question (e.g. A.5B) *Ni kan besvara enkäten på svenska om ni önskar.*

Name of organisation På svenska:..... In English:.....	Contact person for this questionnaire:..... Telephone number:.....
<i>Denna information kommer ej att användas i redovisningen av resultat eller på annat sätt</i>	

1. Location of headquarters (city/town only):

2. Which year did your organisation start working with developing countries and/or Eastern Europe:

3. What proportions of your work is with developing countries?
(In financial terms and including administration in Sweden)

Less than 10%	
10-50%	
50-75%	
75-90%	
Over 90%	

4. What are the sources of your aid besides own contributions? Sida ☐
 EU ☐
 Other _____

5. How much Sida funding have you approximately had on the average per year over the last 5 years ?

6. How many countries do you normally work with?

Africa	Asia	Latin America	Eastern Europe
--------	------	---------------	----------------

7. Are you one of Sida's Frame-organisations (*Ramorganisation*)?

YES ☐
NO ☐

9B. Which organisation do you apply through for Sida funds?
(Frameorganisation)

8. Do you have offices in other countries?

NO ☐

YES ☐

Which? _____

9. What is the main purpose of your aid to developing countries/Eastern Europe?
(*Your policy, 'mission' or similar expressions*)

10. How do you define your target group in developing countries/Eastern Europe?

B. QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE RIDELL REPORT (If your answer is No on question B1, go to section C.)

1. Are you (your organisation) aware of the Ridell Report which took place in 1994 and was published in 1995?
(For details, see the covering letter to this questionnaire)

NO ☐ Continue to section C.
YES ☐

2. Is the Ridell Report available in your organisation?

NO ☐
YES ☐

2B. How did you get it?

Sent by Sida to us ☐
Sent by our Frame-organisation to us. ☐
Requested by us ☐
Other means _____

3. Has the Ridell Report been discussed in your organisation?

NO ☐
YES ☐

3B In what form?

4. Were you consulted concerning the Ridell Report prior to its start, for example, asked to comment on the terms of reference, etc.?

NO ☐
YES ☐

4B In what form?

5. Was anyone in your organisation interviewed by the Ridell Report team?

NO ☐
YES ☐

6. Were you asked to comment on the draft report before its finalisation?

NO	
YES	

6B What were your comments?

7. Were you invited to any workshop/seminar, etc. presenting the Ridell Report?

NO	
YES	

7B Which workshop? _____

7C Who invited you? _____

7D. Did you participate?

NO	
YES	

7E Why not? _____

7F How do you rate the workshop?

Very useful	
Moderately useful	
Not useful	

7G Please comment on the workshop:

For Non-Frame-organisations:

8. Has your Frame organisation initiated any discussion directly related to the Ridell Report?

NO	
YES	

For Frame-organisations:

8. Have you initiated any discussion directly related the Ridell Report with any of 'your' NGOs?

NO	YES
----	-----

For all organisations:

8B What form of discussions have you initiated/has your Frame-organisation initiated?

9. In your opinion, has enough been done to stimulate discussion of the findings of the Ridell Report?

YES	NO
-----	----

9B What else could have been done?

10. Have you sent the Ridell Report to any of your counterpart organisations in developing countries?

NO	YES
----	-----

How many?

11. Have you initiated any discussion concerning the findings of the Ridell Report any of your counterpart organisations?

NO	YES
----	-----

11B In what form?

12. What is your opinion of the following aspects of the Ridell Report?	Very high	High	Moderate	Not so good	Poor
a. Its description of the realities of the Swedish NGOs' work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Its understanding of what Swedish NGOs are all about	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. The usefulness of such an evaluation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. its focus on the most important issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. its usefulness for your work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. The Ridell Report was undertaken by a British team. In your opinion, was this an advantage or a disadvantage as compared to a Swedish team?

Advantage	☐
Disadvantage	☐

13B Please explain why:

14. What impact has the Ridell Report had, if any in your organisation?
(Describe it in your own words)

15. In your opinion, is it useful for Sida to undertake studies like the Ridell Report ?

NO	☐
YES	☐

15B Please, give your reasons:

16. If Sida undertakes a new study, what could be done better?

C. CRITERIA FOR DEVELOPMENT (PLEASE ANSWER EVEN IF YOU HAVE NOT READ THE RIDELL REPORTI)

Please rank the following criteria in terms of importance for your organisation, how you judge your organisation's and your local partners' performance according to these criteria, and your view of the value of technical support from Sida or your Frame-organisation to improve your work according to these criteria as indicated below. Please rank in relative order of importance to your organisation. Use a scale of 0-5 with 5 as the highest.

Criteria and technical methods	How important are these criteria for your development work ?	How well is your organisation performing along these criteria?	How well are your local partner organisation performing along these criteria?	To what degree has the Ridell Report influenced your work or your views on these aspects?	How useful would support from Sida or your Frame-organisation be in developing your capacity?	Comments
1.Focus on the poor						
2. Focus on the very poorest						
3. Stimulate income and employment						
4. Participation by the beneficiaries in the design of projects						
5. Build capacity in local partner organisations						
6. Make projects financially sustainable						
7. Have cost-effective approaches in work						
8. Have a gender focus						
9. Build political and economic independence by host country						
10. Undertake environmental assessment of projects/activities						
11. Stimulate innovation						

Please, remember that you may continue your comments on a separate sheet of paper!

D. THE FINDINGS OF THE RIDEELL REPORT (Please fill in even if you have not read the report)

We would like you to review the key statements made by the Ridell report and comment upon them. (Figures in brackets refer to the page in the report). Make a judgement concerning *your own organisation*, not in general. The study was carried out in 1994. If you agree with the Ridell report, what is your judgement of the situation today as compared to 1994? If you disagree, please indicate why.

Key statement by the evaluation (1994)	Do you agree?		If yes, what is the situation today as compared to 1994?			Comments: If <u>no</u> , why do you disagree? if <u>yes</u> , and <u>better</u> , why?
	Yes	No	Same	Better	Worse	
Poverty focus						
1. NGO projects do not often reach the poorest, and not even necessarily the very poor (12, 76)						
2. There is little evidence to suggest that the work of Swedish NGOs has had much of an impact on poverty (76).						
3. Many Swedish NGOs do not begin from conceptualisation of poverty, of what it is, what causes it and how to address it. (p. 13, 77)						
Economic development and service delivery (Service delivery = provision of health services, education, water and sanitation, etc.)						
4. Service delivery programmes are not likely to make much difference to poverty (79)						
5. The staff and experience of Swedish NGOs do not equip them well to focus on analytical issues related to income and employment generation, markets and market analysis (77)						
6. Swedish NGO supported projects are not very successful in promoting viable income generating projects (96)						
Capacity building in local organisations						
7. It is uncommon that Swedish field personnel possess and provide skills that the local people do not have (92)						

Please, remember that you may continue your comments on a separate sheet of paper!

Key statement by the evaluation (1994)	Do you agree?		If yes, what is the situation today as compared to 1994?		Comments: If no, why do you disagree? If yes, and better, why?
	Yes	No	Same	Better Worse	
8. There is a risk that field workers end up doing the jobs themselves, not building capacity in the local organisation, and sometimes might even obstruct capacity building (14)					
Relationship with Sida and the Swedish government					
9. There has been no requirement for NGOs to provide evidence to Sida that the funds they have received have been used effectively (18)					
10. NGO evaluation and monitoring seems to be done to meet Sida's needs and biased towards financial accounting of how Sida's funds are used, rather than by a concern over development impact (84)					
11. The reporting requirements for Swedish NGOs in receipt of state funds are in many ways insufficient to inform parliament and the wider public about the impact of projects using such funds (112).					
Replication and innovation (Replication means that a project can be repeated by others on a larger scale)					
12. There has been limited replication of successful and innovative NGO projects (13, 83)					
13. Limited replication is due to the low profile of Swedish NGOs and/or their poorly developed links with other NGOs, Sida and government in the respective country (83).					
14. There is an institutional culture in Swedish NGOs that they are more interested in making their ideas work within their own projects than they are in scaling those ideas up to others. (83)					
15. The absence of innovation in Swedish NGOs may reflect a weak institutional commitment to the idea of research (84)					
Sustainability (Sustainability is defined that a project or activity can continue with local resources after aid is over)					
16. Many of the Swedish NGOs and their partners appear to have given little or no thought to financial sustainability at the start of their projects (86)					
17. Little thought is given (by the Swedish NGOs) of how the maintenance of investments in schools, hospitals etc. shall be sustained and who will provide the maintenance funds (87)					

Please, remember that you may continue your comments on a separate sheet of paper!

Key statement by the evaluation (1994)	Do you agree?		If yes, what is the situation today as compared to 1994?			Comments: If <u>no</u> , why do you disagree? If <u>yes</u> , and <u>better</u> , why?
	Yes	No	Same	Better	Worse	
18. The current volume of Sida funds to NGO projects reduces the interest by the NGOs in making their projects sustainable (127)						
19. The Swedish NGOs have looked to the host governments to finance the running of the projects (88)						
<u>Beneficiary participation (participation by the ultimate target group)</u>						
20. There has been limited participation by the beneficiaries in the conception, design and planning stage of NGO projects (13, 80-82)						
21. The limited use of participatory design by Swedish NGOs means that there is a higher risk that the projects will not respond to the beneficiaries (stakeholders) priorities (85)						
<u>NGO management</u>						
22. Insufficient attention is paid by many Swedish NGOs to thinking strategically and realistically about development opportunities in the areas in which they are working (12, 96)						
23. Further work is needed to improve monitoring and evaluation techniques amongst the NGOs (111)						
<u>Environment</u>						
24. Few of the NGO projects incorporate environmental concerns in the design and/or environment is treated extremely superficially (91, 117)						
<u>Gender</u>						
25. Many NGO projects claim to be gender sensitive, but in many regards these activities address symptoms rather than causes of gender-linked poverty (13, 78)						

Please, remember that you may continue your comments on a separate sheet of paper!

E. THE RIDELL REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO Sida (Please answer even if you have not read the Report)

The 1995 Ridell Report made a series of recommendations to Sida (NGO Division) concerning the NGO co-operation. Please comment on these recommendations. (figures in brackets refer to the page in the Ridell Report):

<i>The Ridell Report's recommendation to Sida that Sida should...</i>	<i>Your opinion of the recommendation</i>		<i>As far as you know, has Sida acted upon the recommendation?</i>		<i>If yes, how?</i>
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
1. assist the NGOs to assess development impact of their projects (110)					
2. assist the NGOs to be more exposed to how other (non-Swedish) NGOs undertake impact analysis (110)					
3. provide 'best practices' in monitoring and evaluation by other NGOs to stimulate learning (124)					
4. provide funds to NGOs for international networking with European NGOs on methods for monitoring and evaluation of impact (124)					
5. consider setting up a joint Sida/NGO evaluation working group to promote the use of evaluations (124)					
6. consider sponsoring production of an Annual Report by the main NGOs to the Swedish public on the impact of NGO projects which have received state funds (125)					
7. improve on the internal information sharing in Sida to avoid overlapping, etc. (129)					
8. improve information sharing between Sida and the NGOs in areas and sectors where both Sida and NGOs have direct involvement (129)					

F. NEW GUIDELINES FOR THE NGO SUPPORT

In April 1998, Sida issued a new version of Guidelines for NGOs (*Anvisningar för bidrag till enskilda organisationers utvecklingssamarbete med egeninsats*). The guidelines were prepared in direct response to the criticism by the Ridell Report of the old version.

1. Are you familiar with the new Guidelines

NO ☐

YES ☐

Please, continue to Section G

2. Have you got a copy of the new version?

NO ☐

YES ☐

3. From your perspective, is the new version better than the old?

YES ☐

NO ☐

3B Please give your reason for YES or NO:

4. Do you think that the new Guidelines will improve on the NGO projects?

YES ☐

NO ☐

4B. Please give your reasons for YES or NO:

5. Do you think that the Guidelines will make the NGO projects more focused on poverty? YES

NO

☐

5B Please give your reasons:

ANNEX 6: Details from the Indian field study

Interviewed NGOs with key features

Name	App. Staff + Volunteers	Primary Areas of Work	Swedish Partner	Swedish Aid Since	Input from Sweden	Swedish Aid as percent of Total Budget
Lutheran World Services, Calcutta	500	Health, sanitation, agriculture, disaster response	Church of Sweden Aid	1975	Only funds	10
Indian Council for Child Welfare, Chennai	400	Child welfare	ALVOM	1986	Mainly funds	not available
Village Community Development Society, rural TN	30	Education	Swallows	1980	Funds and ideas	25
Hindustani Covenant Church, Pune	70	Education, social forestry, health	Covenant Church of Sweden	1948	Funds, personnel, concepts	100
Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra, Dehra Dun	100	Legal education local democracy, water, milk mktg.	SSNC	July 1995	Funds, experts	5
Island Trust, rural TN	60	Child welfare	COPE	1990	Funds, ideas, skills	5
Tom Bavin Trust, rural TN	10	Education	Swedish Electricians Union	1994	Funds, ideas	80
Confederation of the Blind, Delhi	120	Education	SRF, CARITAS	1983	Funds, ideas	10
Keystone Foundation, rural TN	10	Tribal welfare, agriculture	Swallows	1994	Funds, skills, ideas	60
TRUPA, rural TN	60	Rural development	Church of Sweden	1979	Funds, overseas exposure	75
Suvartha Alliance Ministries, Nandurbar	10	Education	Swedish Alliance Mission	1904	Funds, ideas	80
Salvation Army, Mumbai	200	Social development	Church sources	Information not available	Only funds	Information not available
Methodist Church, Mumbai	200 +	Disaster relief	Church sources	Information not available	Only funds	Sporadic
TELC Education Development Project, rural TN	Information not available	Education	CSM	1993	Funds, personnel	50

Views of Indian NGOs on issues raised in Proxy Evaluation

Name	Proxy Evaluation: NGOs do not focus on poverty	Impact on income generation	Beneficiary involvement in project planning	Environment concerns	Gender sensitivity	Should there be regular impact analysis
Lutheran World Services	Disagree	Unable to assess	Yes	Consciously addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Indian Council for Child Welfare	Disagree	Unable to assess	Not really	Not really addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Village Community Development Society	Agree	Yes	Partial	Consciously addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Hindustani Covenant Church	Disagree	Yes	Yes	Consciously addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Rural Litigation and Entitlement	Agree	Partial	Yes	Consciously addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Island Trust	Disagree	Yes	Somewhat	Consciously addressed	Not really addressed	Yes
Tom Bavin Trust	Disagree	No	Not really	Somewhat	Somewhat	Yes
Confederation of the Blind	Disagree	No	Yes	Not addressed	Consciously addressed	Yes
Keystone Foundation	Disagree	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
TRUPA	Agree	Yes	Under planning	Somewhat	Consciously addressed	Yes
Suvartha Alliance Ministries	Agree	No	No	Somewhat	No clear views	Yes

Sida Studies in Evaluation

- 96/1 Evaluation and Participation - some lessons. Anders Rudqvist, Prudence Woodford-Berger
Department for Evaluations and Internal Audit
- 96/2 Granskning av resultatanalyserna i Sidas landstrategiarbete. Göran Schill
Department for Evaluations and Internal Audit
- 96/3 Developmental Relief? An Issues Paper and an Annotated Bibliography on Linking Relief and Development. Claes Lindahl
Department for Evaluations and Internal Audit
- 96/4 The Environment and Sida's Evaluations. Tom Alberts, Jessica Andersson
Department for Evaluations and Internal Audit
- 97/1 Using the Evaluation Tool. A survey of conventional wisdom and common practice at Sida. Jerker Carlsson, Kim Forss, Karin Metell, Lisa Segnestam, Tove Strömberg
Department for Evaluations and Internal Audit
- 97/2 Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality. An Assessment of Sida's Country Reports and Evaluations in 1995-96. Eva Tobisson, Stefan de Vylder
Secretariat for Policy and Corporate Development.
- 98/1 The Management of Disaster Relief Evaluations. Lessons from a Sida evaluation of the complex emergency in Cambodia. Claes Lindahl
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 98/2 Uppföljande studie av Sidas resultatanalyser. Göran Schill
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 98/3 Evaluating Gender Equality - Policy and Practice. An assessment of Sida's evaluations in 1997 - 1998. Lennart Peck
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 99/1 Are Evaluations Useful? Cases from Swedish Development Cooperation. Jerker Carlsson, Maria Eriksson-Baaz, Ann Marie Fallenius, Eva Lövgren
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 99/2 Managing and Conducting Evaluations. Design study for a Sida evaluation manual. Lennart Peck, Stefan Engström
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit
- 99/3 Understanding Regional Research Networks in Africa. Fredrik Söderbaum
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit



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