

Project Committee



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1. General information on the Project Committee

Under Sida's standing orders, the Project Committee (PC) is a body that shall

- assess proposals for contributions exceeding SEK 50 million prior to the decisions of the Director General, or prior to the submission of such proposals to the Swedish Government
- Assess proposals for contributions that are still at a preparatory stage and for which departments and embassies request advice.

In addition to its formal mandate, the task of the PC is to compile experiences and draw conclusions on the proposals presented to the PC, to promote amendments and seek clarifications of Sida's policies and methods.

The rationale behind the PC is thus to contribute to quality assurance and to Sida's continuous development of methods for the assessment of projects and programs for Swedish support.

The Director General of Sida appoints the members of the PC. Members are chosen in their personal capacity. They represent a cross-section of Sida, with a suitable balance between departments, women and men, age groups and levels of experience. A Sida staff member with current or previous experience as Head of Department/Secretariat chairs the Committee.

Information on the PC's routines and working methods is available on the Intranet ("Information on the Project Committee" and "What happens in the Project Committee"). Furthermore, an up-dated schedule for the forthcoming PC meetings and records from previous meetings can be found on the Intranet.

2. Some statistics for 2002

The PC met 18 times in 2002. Three meetings were wholly or partly devoted to PC's internal planning and working methods, including meeting with project committees of three departments at Sida-HQ, (DESO, INEC and NATUR) and the preparation of the annual report. The other meetings were devoted to the assessment of 19 proposals for Swedish support.

The number of proposals assessed by the PC has remained remarkably stable during recent years, fluctuating between 16 and 19 during the period 1998–2002. In previous years, the sectors of infrastructure, health, and education have dominated the agenda of the PC. In 2002 infrastructure remained at a high level (five proposals examined), while health and education only represented three proposals in total. On the other hand there was a larger number of proposals than before in agriculture and rural development (four proposals) and support to Swedish and international organisations (five proposals).

Seven of the proposals assessed had their location in Africa, three in Asia and two in Latin America. Five proposals were global in nature: support to the organisations World Health Organisation (WHO), World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SNF). There was also a submission to the Swedish Government concerning economic reforms.

In all cases but one the PC recommended the Director General to approve the proposals. The PC normally gave recommendations of modifications in the assessment memorandum prior to the decision by the Director General. The PC referred one proposal back, and the assessment memo was modified and resubmitted.

3. Frequent issues discussed at PC meetings

The PC's review of Assessment Memoranda (AM) is based on *Sida at Work*, which in turn refers to various strategies, policies and guidelines which are to be taken into consideration. A draft legal agreement and an LFA matrix should always accompany the AM.

The issues discussed at PC meetings vary reflecting weaknesses and strengths in the program/project and the AM discussed, but also the wide scope of Sida's portfolio of programs and projects. In 2002 the following issues were discussed frequently:

- The issue of *relevance* from a policy point of view is seldom questioned by the PC, but on several occasions the AM has lacked reference to a country (or regional) strategy and/or an analysis of poverty and other mainstreaming issues.
- *Analysis of results* of earlier support and *lessons learnt* are missing in many proposals, surprisingly enough also in proposals for programs/projects, which have received Swedish support for a very long time. This malpractise will probably persist as many times indicators for measuring results and effects have not been established and base-line studies have not been made.
- Aspects of *feasibility* and *sustainability* were in focus, in particular the importance of an identification of *roles* for the various actors and of *ownership*. Deviation from Sida's norms can often be explained by special circumstances, and many AM would have gained in clarity by spelling out and explaining such deviations rather than to avoid discussing them.
- *Risk assessments* have in general become more elaborate, but risk management is not sufficiently developed.
- There is often a lack of analysis of *alternatives* to the proposed solution.
- Discussions of the time perspective of the Swedish engagement (*exit*) have been raised on a number of occasions.
- *Legal and procurement issues* are raised on most occasions; sometimes the draft agreements are missing altogether.
- On a few occasions it has actually been difficult to understand what the program/project is all about. This has been aggravated when too sketchy a budget at the activity level is included in the proposal. This could easily be remedied by the introduction of a fact sheet to be used in all AMs.

4. Forms of co-operation, trends and implications for methods of work

Given that *silent partnership* last year featured as a clearly emerging trend (three contributions in 2001), it can be noted that no such contribution was presented to the PC in 2002. Sida's internal project group for program support has drafted a position paper that outlines Sida's approach to silent partnership. The paper proposes that PC should focus on whether Sida's requirements are met by the active partner's equivalent of the assessment memorandum and draft agreement. The PC intends to discuss whether and how the PC shall handle this type of support in connection with new proposals for silent partnership. As a principle, however, the PC will wish to discuss principles involved, and the rationale behind the proposed strategic option to take on the role as a silent partner.

The implications of the shift from project support towards a program approach have featured frequently in the discussions in the PC. The function of the Country Strategy as a management tool in this process needs to be refined.

Two different categories of program support to governments can be distinguished in the presentations to the PC; sector programme support and budget support for economic reforms.

It can be concluded that most proposals discussed in the PC represent an early stage in the transition towards *sector program support*. The PC has commented on the absence of reflection on what implications in terms of time perspective, roles, competence and capacity that the shift towards sector programs will have.

The overall impression is that there are significant variations between different sector- and regional departments in the interpretation of the policy. How Sida will act in a given situation depends to a large extent on contextual factors, such as the awareness and position of influential actors, not at least within the donor community, towards a program approach. It is clear that sector program support creates methodological problems to its users and that this needs to be addressed in a revised Sida at Work. The PC recognises the need for a more coherent and sequenced approach to program support. The absence of baseline information remains a perpetual problem. Even process-oriented programs need to be monitored against benchmarks.

The program approach has made the split between the planning and implementation phases less distinctive. Subsequently the distinction between the assessment phase and the implementation phase in the Sida contribution cycle has to be fairly flexible. In the light of this situation, a critical level of readiness to engage in a program has to be established with some degree of urgency. This is a reflection of a situation where Sida's assessments have become more strategic and forward-looking, focusing on the management of risks and opportunities. In this connection there is need to discuss at what stage the Director General and subsequently the PC should become involved.

Given the number of actors involved at different stages of the assessment of *budget support for economic reform*, the PC has reflected on and questioned its own role in the quality assurance process.

Sida's role and responsibilities in the monitoring of *budget support to organisations* is one area where further method development is needed. It has often been unclear to the PC what strategy and mechanisms Sida will use to ensure efficiency in its dialogue with the recipient partner organisations, which in many cases receive additional project funds from Sida. Questions that have been raised relate to what the organisation has achieved in terms of value for its beneficiaries and how this can be verified. Another aspect relates to development of methods, administration and management, financing, adaptation of strategic focus etc in order to improve the quality and relevance of its services.

Support to rural development is moving in the direction of support to decentralised governance through provisions of funds for local investments, *area based programmes*. This is a challenging new opportunity for Sida to address poverty issues at the local level. But the approach also includes substantial risks. Recognising this, the PC would recommend a more coherent analysis which would help to bring about a better understanding of the political and ideological context within which local governments have emerged, roles and functions of local government institutions, their inter-relationships, their relationships to central political institutions and the reform process as well as their role and functions vis-à-vis administrative structures. It is the PC's impression that Sida tends to approach governance reform from different angles, and through different partners and it is not always clear to PC if this is based on a consistent theory and/or an integrated strategy. Furthermore, PC has noted the need for a Sida strategy on how to handle these complex programs internally, including which department shall be in the lead and how to co-operate within Sida and with the Embassy.

5. Exchange of Experience between the PC and Other Parts of Sida

Quality assurance work is performed by a number of different entities within Sida apart from PC. Attempts should be made to establish closer links and for this reason PC has decided to have bi-annual meetings with the Methods Development Unit.

As a follow-up of last year's annual report the PC held meetings with representatives of the project committees of departments at Sida-HQ for an exchange of experience. The next step should be to establish close links with the project committees at the embassies. An excellent opportunity to do this should be during the planned introduction and dissemination of *Perspectives of Poverty* and the new *Sida at Work* from September 2003 onwards.

PC members are often absent due to frequent travelling. This on occasions results in a low attendance at meetings and also creates problems to find opponents. Accordingly, the PC will recommend the Director General to increase the number of members from ten to twelve.

During the second half of 2001, the circle of opponents was extended to include a number of members of staff in addition to the members of the PC. The purpose of this was manifold: – to decrease the workload on PC members, to increase the interest in PC's work and inject new ideas into PC's work. By the end of 2002 most of these potential opponents have moved on to other tasks. A new attempt to recruit potential opponents will be made during 2003.

An idea to further increase the exposure to the PC could be to invite coming rapporteurs to take part in PC meetings on proposals of a similar character.

In the 2001 annual report the intention was announced to introduce a routine for a quarterly follow-up of what has happened to the contributions processed by the PC. This has not been effected but PC intends to do it.

There has been some confusion on how to handle PC's recommendations. The conclusion is that the responsible department should indicate to the Director General what changes have been made/or not made in the AM following PC's discussions. A standard sentence to this effect will be introduced in all minutes from PC meetings.

The PC will follow up its work through collecting the views of the reporting department on procedures before, during and after the meetings through a mini questionnaire in direct connection with the meeting.

Although information about the PC and how it works is easily available at the Intranet, experience shows that some rapporteurs are insecure about PC and its work. For this reason the rapporteur will in the future receive a standard letter with all relevant information, as soon as a proposal has been scheduled for processing with the PC secretariat.

6. Administrative matters

From January 1, 2003 the PC secretariat is part of the Methods Development Unit. The secretariat consists of a co-ordinator, an assistant co-ordinator and the secretary to the PC, all on part time basis. This arrangement should facilitate the necessary close links between the Methods Development Unit, as the main developer of methods, and the PC as the prime setter of norms for the abundance of methods.

Some new routines have gradually been introduced in PC's internal work. To facilitate the structuring of the discussion the chairman, the co-ordinator and the opponent meet before the meeting to identify relevant issues to discuss and agree on a tentative mode of discussion.

It has also been decided that, whenever feasible, the PC should conclude the meetings with a short reflection on lessons learnt.

It can be foreseen that an increasing number of proposals processed through the PC will have been prepared at the embassies and that accordingly more NPOs will be involved. It is thus important that all information about the PC be available in English. To this end this annual report has been produced in English only.

7. Concluding remarks

The introduction and dissemination of *Perspectives of Poverty* and the new *Sida at Work* will have important implications for the future production of Assessment Memoranda and accordingly for PCs work. The introduction of the new *Sida at Work* will thus have to be preceded by an exchange of information and discussions between POLICY and METOD as owners of the two documents and the PC.

To increase the exposure between the PC and various parts of Sida, PC intends to develop the contacts with local PCs, in particular those in the field, and to extend the number of potential opponents in the PC

PC has noted that the formal base for PCs work, a decision by the Director General, should be renewed and PCs terms of reference clearly spelled out. In this connection PC will suggest to the Director General to expand the PC with two more members from ten to twelve.

PC has noted that sector and regional departments are often not represented at the Head of Department or Head of Division level at the PC meetings, when a proposal from their region/thematic area is discussed. This is unfortunate in particular now with an increasing number of fully delegated embassies. PC will continue to urge the regional and sector departments to participate at a senior level.

Annex

Project No Date	Project/Period/Volume	Department	Decision
1/2002 25-jan	Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, North/South Programme 2002-2004 59 MSEK	NATUR LUV	DG Decision 02 04 23
2/2002 14-feb	Ferry Connection across the Zambeze, Mocambique 47MSEK	INEC/ INFRA	DG Decision 02 03 11
3/2002 22-feb	Local Development in the Housing Sector, Phase II, 2002-2006 52,5 MSEK	INEC/ URBAN	DG Decision 02 07 02
4-5/2002 07-mar	Agriculture Sector in Mocambique; PRO- AGRI and Malonda Programme 2002-2004 75 MSEK	Amb/Moc	DG Decision 02 08 26
6/2002 22-mar	Urban Reforms in India 2002-2004 119 MSEK	INEC/ URBAN	Re-referral to PC
7/2002 05-apr	World Health Organization (WHO) 2002-2003 85 MSEK	DESO/ HÄLSO	DG Decision 02 04 22
8/2002 19-apr	Urban Reforms Programme, India 2002-2004 119 MEK	INEC/ URBAN	DG Decision 02 07 05
9/2002 17-may	World Conservation Union (IUCN) 2002-2004 90 MSEK	NATUR/ LUV	DG Decision 02 10 01
10/2002 31-may	Agriculture Support Programme, Zambia 2003-2007 240 MSEK	NATUR/ LUV	DG Decision 02 06 26

Project No	Project/Period/Volume	Department	Decision
Date 11/2002 31-may	Vietnam-Sweden Cooperation on Health Policy and Systems Development 2002-2006 90 MSEK	DESO/ HÄLSO	DG Decision 02 10 29
12/2002 28-jun	Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF) Conditional Loan 200 MSEK	INEC/ FINANS	DG Decision 03 03 18
13/2002 06-sep	Upgrading of Transmission Net, Mongolia U Credit 50 MSEK	INEC/ FINANS	Government Letter 02 12 06
14/2002 20-sep	International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2002-2003 140 MSEK	DESO/ HÄLSO	DG Decision 02 11 12
15/2002 18-oct	Decentralization of the Health Sector, Honduras, 2003-2005 70 MSEK	DESO/	DG Decision 02 11 19
16/2002 08-nov	Seila Programme, Cambodia 2003-2005 141,5 MSEK	NATUR/ LUV	DG Decision 02 11 22
17/2002 15-nov	Economic Reforms 3003	ASIEN/ POLICY	Government Letter 02 12 12 Gov Decision 03 03 06
18/2002 13-dec	Rural Water and Sanitation Programme, Uganda, 2003-2007 255 MSEK	NATUR/ VATTEN	DG Decision 03 01 23
19/2002 13-dec	Sector Programme Support Education, Tanzania, 2003-2006 450 MSEK	DESO/ UND	DG Decision 03 01 30

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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