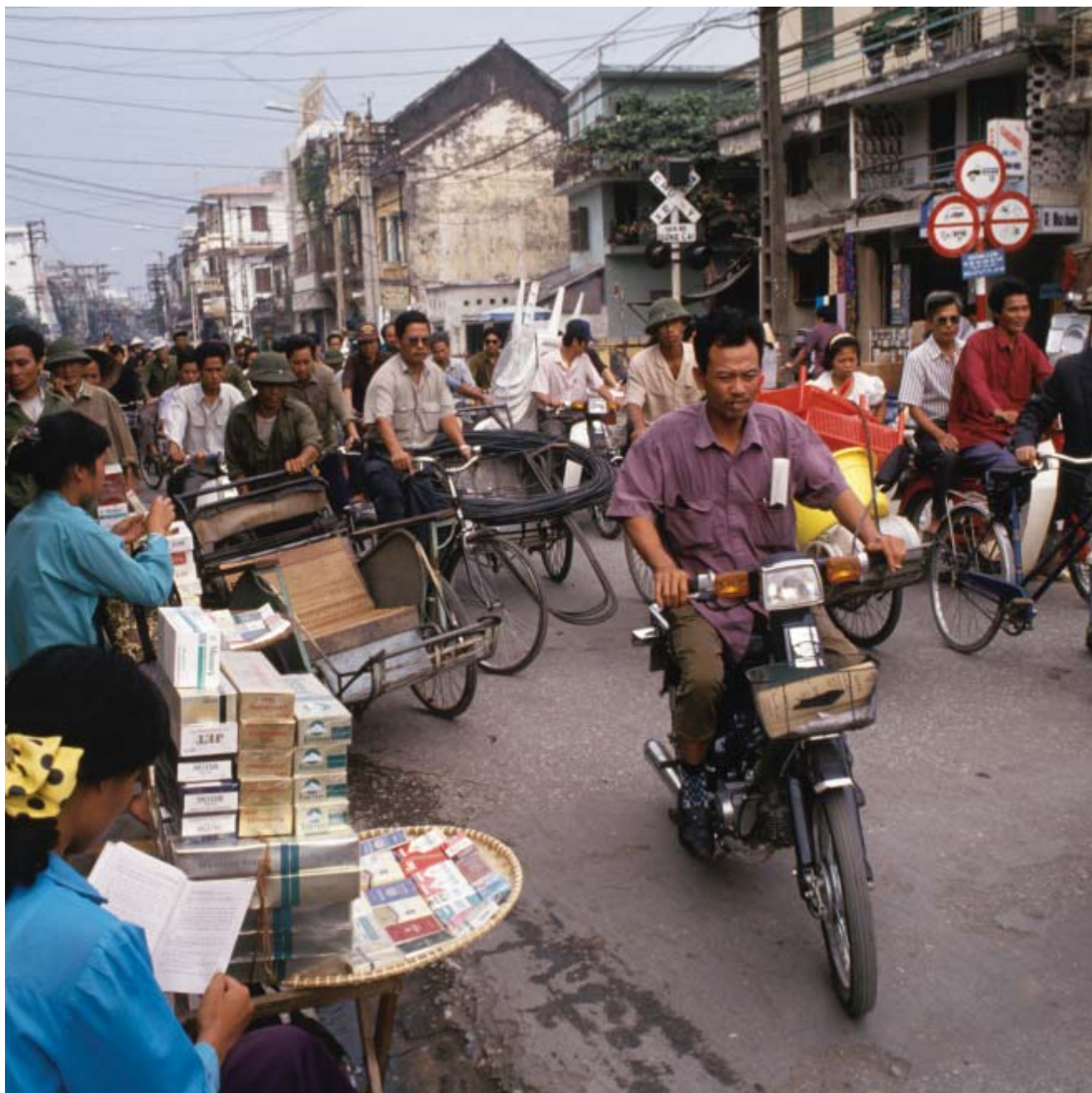


The role of locally employed professionals



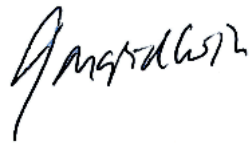
Foreword

The personnel is Sida's most important asset. Competent personnel in sufficient numbers employed locally is a necessary complement to posted staff if Sida should meet its objectives – a reduction of poverty.

This paper, which has been written as a commission given to PEO by the Field Vision, constitutes general guidelines as a basis for Sida's new approach to the professional staff employed locally and with special focus on the National Programme Officers.

The purpose of this paper is double – to be a guide to managers and employees and to be a recognition by Sida's management of the importance of locally employed staff in Sida's work.

The paper is not a replacement to any of the existing handbooks, policies or rules, it is a complement to these.



Ingrid Wibom
Director
Human Resources Department

Published by Sida 2003

The Human Resources Department

Author: Göran Engstrand, Britt Marie Breiding

Printed by Edita Sverige AB, 2003

Art. no.: SIDA3060en

Background and Purpose

Sida's Field Vision is a manifestation of a change that has effects for Sida in its entirety. A strengthened field is a prerequisite for Sida's main objective – to effectively contribute to the work of reducing poverty. The strengthening of the field includes increased decision-making powers, extension of the right to use funds, sufficient manning of all field offices, improved status in respect of telecommunications etc, i.e. a complete set of reinforcement activities.

A cornerstone in the work to “field-orient” Sida is the staff in the field. Since the outset, Sida has had staff posted in the field and, even in the early days, Sida employed some of the staff locally, initially as support staff and subsequently also at the professional level, as programme officers and administrators. Today there are as many locally employed programme officers as seconded ones. The locally employed staff are often the backbone of the embassy. They represent continuity and institutional memory and are the gateway into local society. The challenge is to utilise the full potential of this local staff.

PEO's task

In view of the increase in field orientation, Sida-PEO has, been given the special task of presenting models, routines, policies and plans for Sida's human resources activities in this connection. Sida-based staff are expected to work in the field more often (short-term assignments) and for longer periods than at present. Thus, a recruitment policy for this purpose is necessary. Regarding locally employed staff, the National Programme Officers (NPOs) will play a more prominent part and will increase in numbers. In light of the increased focus on locally employed professionals, PEO has been commissioned to issue a policy paper and to establish general guidelines as a basis for Sida's new approach to this increasingly important group.

At present, Sida is making considerable investments in locally recruited professional staff. Over a five-year period, the number of NPOs will be more than doubled and, even more important, the position of NPOs will be substantially upgraded and NPOs will be on an equal footing with posted staff. Posted programme officers and programme officers employed locally will work side by side. The only difference will be in terms of employment and the restrictions on diplomatic missions by the

Vienna Convention. Targeted human resource development and adjustments of local routines and roles to support the establishment of new attitudes to the role of NPOs will back up the upgrading of the NPOs' position. It will not be possible to achieve everything everywhere overnight but the objective has been established – the NPOs are a group of full-fledged Sida operators, even if employed by the embassies.

Purpose of the guidelines

- ✕ To create a common view and understanding of the increasingly important role of locally employed professional staff at field offices for all members of staff at Sida;
- ✕ To offer an invitation to all locally employed professionals to take part more substantially in the ongoing process of renewal;
- ✕ To provide guidelines for the field offices in matters relating to locally employed professionals.

These guidelines are general and can be applied to different categories of professional staff employed locally. However, they give particular attention to the local programme staff.

The locally employed professionals are employed because they have particular skills that are in demand at the embassy. However, in most cases they lack knowledge about Sweden and Sida, Sweden's development policy, and the methods and routines used locally by the embassy. It is therefore important to develop their capacity in these respects.

Sida, and the embassy, should offer a working environment that is stimulating and that also develops their skills. This includes distinct management, unambiguous expectations and mandates, monitoring and follow-up of results, and opportunities of personal development. In this paper, the focus has been put on the professional staff, e.g. National Programme Officers (NPOs) and National Administrative Officers (NAOs). Support staff, such as drivers, messengers, etc, are essential for the effective functioning of field offices. However, they fall outside the scope of this paper.

Recruitment

Procedures for the recruitment of locally employed staff are described in the *Administrative Handbook of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2002*. The aim of these guidelines is not to replace the handbook in any sense, but rather to assist embassies in establishing a full understanding of Sida's present position on locally employed professionals and their role in Sida's operations. These guidelines should be seen as an aid and a supplement to the handbook. They are in harmony.

The possibility of recruiting professional staff varies considerably from one country to another. Recruitments are made on a market, which can be limited or wide. Some countries have shortages of qualified candidates and some have surpluses, but it is possible to recruit locally almost everywhere. Supply and demand will determine the selection of the recruitment strategy. No strategy is wrong but some have proven to be more effective than others. The strategy selected can range from using professional head-hunters to the promotion of in-house staff. One piece of advice is always to consult donor colleagues in the country or in neighbouring countries and ascertain what they have done.

Job description

When establishing a recruitment policy and a job description, make sure that all available tools and means are used, for example "Sida's Staff Policy" and the "Staff Flower". These are definitions of what it means to be a member of staff at Sida and are also applicable to local conditions. Be clear about the specific needs! Decide whether the post should be permanent or for a limited period only. Remember that you can always turn to Sida-S and PEO and/or FU who can provide information and experience on other recruitments made elsewhere.

It is normally the immediate superior to the post that is to be recruited who is in the best position to compile a job description for the vacancy. The first step should always be to establish whether or not the actual division of work at the office is satisfactory for forthcoming work purposes. Perhaps a rotation of existing staff would have the effect that another post than that vacant should be advertised!

The basis for the job description is the country strategy, the country plan and specific needs expressed by sector and regional departments at Sida. It is crucial that, from the time the recruitment is initiated, the

sector department shoulders the role of “subject-mentor”, and is thus given the opportunity to comment upon the job description.

The Head of Administration is normally responsible for the recruitment of administrative staff and should also be involved in and responsible for the advertising of all posts.

Conditions of employment

All locally employed staff are employed by the embassy, but the locally employed programme staff are also part of Sida’s operational staff and the professional administrative staff are part of Sida’s administrative support.

Permanent or time-limited employment

Employment is normally offered on a permanent basis, starting with a six-month probation period. However, in some cases it can be advantageous to offer time-limited employment – especially to Programme Officers – in view of the fact that their work originates from the country strategy and the country plan – which are both limited in time, and normally no longer than 2–3 years. It is the type and length of the respective task that decides the duration of employment. If you use time-limited employment, check the local labour legislation to ensure that this is possible in your country. Also make sure that the time limitation is in accordance with the Administrative Handbook and the “LAS” law, which a Swedish embassy should follow, even when employing non-Swedes.

In real terms, permanent employment is no more secure than time-limited employment since it is the type of work that determines the professional skills needed during certain periods. Lack of work (“arbetsbrist”) is a formal cause for giving notice and can be used should Sida’s activities in your country change in focus and the professional skills available cannot be used elsewhere at the embassy.

Well educated and experienced NPOs and NAOs are attractive on the local labour market and a certain circulation or turnover of staff can have development effects for both parties. What is most important in this context is that Sida and the embassies live up to expectations on them to act as good employers and that local labour laws are followed.

The “Terms and Conditions for Locally Engaged Staff in X-land”, issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, and adjusted to local conditions, is the document that governs conditions of employment. Conditions will differ between countries, but should always be the same for all local staff in the same country – apart from, in some cases, the duration of employment.

Introduction – the first year

All new employees shall be given an adequate and well-planned introduction immediately on arrival to the office. This is not only to show, in practice, that the new employee is welcome but, above all, to create a foundation for the further learning of all necessary aspects of the work. The need of becoming familiar with most of the ordinary embassy routines as quickly as possible should not be underestimated. Standing Orders/By-Laws could be one place to start. Where NPOs are concerned, a deep and long introduction is normally necessary. We recommend the following:

1. Appoint one of the Programme Officers as a mentor for the NPO. If possible, choose a PO with broad experience of development cooperation and a genuine interest in contributing to the NPO's development. The member of staff chosen should have the capacity to conduct stimulating and learning dialogues. The mentorship could normally last for a year, or longer. At large offices it may be possible to organise teams of SPOs and NPOs for mutual learning purposes. Where NAOs are concerned, either the Head of Administration or someone else in the administration could take on the mentorship.
2. Ensure that new employee is informed about and understands all conditions relating to his/her employment. This includes:
 - ✕ Conditions of employment, including pension schemes
 - ✕ Procedure for annual planning talks,
 - ✕ Frequency and procedure for salary reviews,
 - ✕ Security arrangements, including access to and handling of confidential material.

Be transparent and specific on differences in terms of employment between locally employed staff and posted staff. Explain why access to confidential material is restricted for local staff and why local staff may not represent the office at certain external events. Inform the new employee that posted staff are on the diplomatic list and what this entails.

During the introduction, express the embassy's expectations of the new employee clearly, i.e. how performance will be measured. Set clear targets for performance for both the short and long term.

Human resource development

1. Draw a concrete plan for the development of the new employee.
This will be an important instrument in subsequent planning talks. Make sure that all those involved are consulted, including the sector department concerned at Sida-S. The goal is that, within a certain period, preferably not exceeding 12 months, the employee should have acquired good basic knowledge about Sida.
2. Contact Sida-PEO/EOL and enquire when the next course for NPOs will take place, and register your new staff member. Also enquire how and when he/she can be trained in other basic skills, for example PLUS, etc. EOL can also assist in arranging regional human resource development seminars, based on special needs, as a follow-up to the course in Stockholm.
3. The sector department concerned at Sida-S is responsible for engaging the NPOs in its network, which includes providing information about opportunities for training in the sector area, and taking initiatives when appropriate.
4. All professional staff should be given opportunities to visit Sida-S for programmes of human resource development, and for participation in seminars and short-term assignments at departments. However, there will never be unlimited resources available for this purpose, and therefore it is necessary to have good long-term planning, both in the field and at Sida-S.

Do not underestimate the time it takes and the resources needed to introduce qualified locally employed staff members properly. Remember that a committed coach is invaluable for guiding a new employee into the world of Swedish development cooperation.

It is recommended that a follow-up is made after three months. Sit down with the employee and make an evaluation of the period. What has worked well? What has not worked? What can be improved (on both sides!)? Try to be very clear and specific about the embassy's requirements and expectations. Also find out how the employee has experienced the first three months. If things have not worked so well, this may be due to misunderstandings. This meeting offers a way to correct misunderstandings and to enable the employee to continue on the right

path. Set a date for a new evaluation three months later and repeat this process. The Head of Administration should be responsible for meetings with NAOs and the PO coach (or Head of Mission) for the NPOs.

Salary and financing

Salary systems shall naturally follow the instructions in the Administrative Handbook. However, they should also be related to the local labour market. It is recommended that each embassy keeps itself well informed of the salaries offered to staff by other similar employers – who may be potential competitors, at least as far as NPOs are concerned.

Salary revisions

Salary revisions normally take place annually. The routines for salary revisions apply to all locally employed staff, as set out in the Administrative Handbook. The Head of Administration is the immediate superior of NAOs and is thus aware of each and every employee's qualifications, performance etc. In the case of NPOs, it is necessary that the Head of Mission/Head of Development Co-operation takes part in the salary review and gives his/her recommendations. It is important to have "salary talks" with all employees, in which the reasons for the outcome of the salary revision are given.

Security matters, secrecy and access

Security requirements at Swedish embassies entail certain restrictions for all locally employed staff. This means, for example, that a locally employed person cannot have access to the classified archive, nor be alone inside the embassy – either during or outside office hours. This should of course be clarified to all staff when they start work at an embassy but every effort should be made to limit the effects of these restrictions on the work of local staff.

Normally the restrictions do not cause any major or insoluble problems for the local staff, but can do so for staff working more independently. During "sector reviews" and similar events, there may be a need for the NPOs to work overtime and on other occasions for administrative staff. Therefore, have an open mind, look for creative solutions and be flexible with the aim of limiting the constraints. Supplying portable computers for work at home could be one solution, mobile phones another. In some offices it may be possible to establish a specific room outside the "security-doors".

Delegation of responsibilities and powers – NPOs

The general rule must be that the NPOs shall work at the same level and side by side with the Swedish Programme Officers. An NPO could well shoulder the full responsibility for a programme and report directly to the Head of Development Cooperation. At large offices, an NPO may very well be appointed co-ordinator for a group of officers. The degree of delegation of responsibilities and powers is based on the NPO's qualifications and experience. As regards the authority of NPOs to make and sign decision – this is still not possible. If and when a change is made, this will be included in Sida's rules.

The culture and practices of embassies can constitute a restriction in the short-term but, if so, this should gradually change to better meet today's opportunities and demands. In some countries an NPO still needs a Swedish colleague at his/her side in order to adhere to the local formal protocol in certain situations, in others not. It is important to be transparent when delegating responsibilities and powers in varying degrees to NPOs, in order to avoid distrust.

Development/career opportunities

There are also career opportunities for locally employed personnel at the embassies. Although the posts are limited in numbers, different possibilities exist. After performing well for a couple of years, a young, somewhat inexperienced Junior Officer, could be promoted to Programme Officer or Accountant and possibly later also to Senior Officer.

It is important to hold individual planning and development talks with all locally engaged personnel. These talks should take place once a year and take up the results achieved as well as planned goals. New instructions on how to conduct these talks are being produced.

Depending on their profession, experience etc, it is possible to use locally employed professionals for specific tasks. These could include taking part in policy development work, being a member of a reference group, representing Sida or the embassy in local co-ordination activities etc.

One way of obtaining a better career can also be to leave the embassy and use what has been learnt there as a base for a career – but outside Sida!

Access to information

An increasing amount of Sida's documentation is in English, but still there are a number of key documents that are only available in Swedish. This may be the single most important constraint to the full incorporation of all locally employed staff in Sida's work. It will never be possible for the Swedish Government to work in a foreign language only, but all efforts should be made by all members of staff at Sida to use English to the greatest extent possible. One minimum requirement shall be that all documents are available in English. Do not forget to introduce your new employees to Inside on the net!

A second constraint at the embassies concerns communication. All locally employed professionals have the same right to access to information needed in their work. Meetings in Swedish should therefore be avoided and be limited to subjects of a plain Swedish nature. The embassies should ensure that all communication takes place in the working language.

The “learning embassy”

Continuous learning is a necessity in all knowledge organisations. Ways and means for learning will vary from time to time and from place to place. Some ideas are provided below which could be useful to enable embassies to become learning embassies.

1. Create arenas for learning, meeting places where knowledge can be exchanged and new ideas developed.
2. Create an atmosphere where people ask each other for help and support each other. This would increase the opportunities for cross fertilisation of expertise for seconded Swedish staff and locally employed staff and management.
3. Examples of good arenas for learning are:
 - ✕ Working in teams and/or projects that include SPOs, NPOs and the administrative personnel when suitable,
 - ✕ Project committees in the embassy,
 - ✕ Discussing Sida's policies, innovations, central concepts such as ownership, partnership, dialogue etc in mini-seminars or similar occasions,
 - ✕ Involving everyone in creating visions and planning operations,
 - ✕ Rating is also a very useful tool for reflection and learning.

Finally, remember that a good working climate and efficiency in the management team always pays off in the form of more efficiency, learning and motivation within the entire embassy!

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.



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

SE-105 25 Stockholm Sweden
Phone: +46 (0)8 698 50 00
Fax: +46 (0)8 698 56 15
info@sida.se, www.sida.se