

Evaluations of Country Strategies

An Overview of Experiences and a Proposal for
Shaping Future Country Programme Evaluations

Stefan Dahlgren



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Foreword



How should development cooperation be assessed at country level? The bi-lateral donors have over the years had different opinions about country-level evaluations and currently British DFID is among the few bi-lateral donors to carry out such evaluations on a regular basis. The multi-lateral organisations on the other hand, notably the EU Commission, the World Bank and several large members of the UN family, have developed particular formats for country programme evaluations on a regular basis.

Country programme evaluations were, however, never important for Sida and Swedish aid efforts and only a few have been carried out. This is a bit of a paradox since Sweden was among the first donors to implement country programming and to emphasise long-term commitments in donor-recipient relations. At present Sweden performs less ambitious assessments of the results achieved as an input to the reformulation of country strategies.

The present study summarises experiences from country strategy or country programme evaluations in various organisations. It looks at the possibility of applying such experiences to Swedish development cooperation in view of the current trends in aid ideology and practice

The main conclusion of the study is that country programme evaluations are perceived to be useful by the donors concerned in spite of their modest ambition in establishing a causal relationship between the support provided by development cooperation and development outcomes. The study also comments on the apparent weak interest shown by partner countries in such evaluations. Obviously there is a remaining challenge to donors when it comes to designing country level evaluations that cater to the needs of partner countries to steer the volume and modalities of development cooperation funding.

Stockholm, april 2007

Eva Lithman
Director
Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DANIDA	Danish International Development Assistance
EC	European Commission
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
SASDA	Secretariat for Analysis of Swedish Development Assistance
SAU	Sekretariatet för analys av svenskt utvecklingssamarbete
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UTV	Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit, Sida

1 Introduction

This report has two parts. The first part is a summary and discussion on experiences of country programme evaluations. The second, much shorter part, is a proposal on ways in which Sida can improve results management at country level by carrying out different kinds of country programme evaluations instead of the current outcome assessments. It is not an obvious solution, but it appears to be suitable and possible in light of the shortcomings that exist in current results management and the requirements decided on by Sida for better accounting for the results of the operation.

The background to the study comes from a desire within Sida's Department for Evaluation to summarise existing experiences from country programme evaluations, internationally and within Sida, and to discuss different ways of formulating possible future country programme evaluations. This is in part due to the recent change in procedures for Swedish country strategies by Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs¹ and a renewed interest in country programme evaluations, in particular by the multinational organisations. The interest in clearer use of management by results within development cooperation at a level that is higher than the project also adds to the importance of the issue of the usefulness of country programme evaluations.

The main issues for the study are:

- a) Is it possible to evaluate country strategies as coherent programmes?
- b) What can such evaluations offer and to whom?
- c) What resources are required by country strategy evaluations?

The issues of whether country strategies are a good idea at all and what function they serve will naturally also be discussed in the report.

The study is a reasoned review and is not based on our own primary material other than the appraisal of a number of country strategies from different organisations to gain a better understanding of content and methods. The level of ambition of the study was not to conduct a comprehensive and full appraisal of country programme evaluations and the methods used. The aim was to use summaries of existing material, as far as possible, and to discuss, critically, previous experiences from the partly new points of departure that have been mentioned.

¹ Since 2005, Swedish cooperation talks about *cooperation strategies* rather than country strategies to stress that at least two parties are involved in the matter. The Swedish part of the process and the background documents also differ in part from before. The basic idea is to have a simpler and quicker creation process that requires less resources. For more on this, see Section 3. See also the manual *Sida at Work – Cooperation Strategies* (Sida 2005).

The report looks at experiences of country programme evaluations by other development cooperation agencies, the way they are summarised at a number of conferences as well as experiences of ongoing country programme evaluations, primarily at the European Commission, UNDP, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and at the two bilateral development cooperation agencies DANIDA and DFID. The methodology of these evaluations is described briefly in the main body of the text and in more detail in a separate appendix², as there may be ideas that can be 'borrowed' for possible future Swedish country programme evaluations. The report also discusses possible opportunities and limitations in follow-ups of the partner countries' Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS).

The report ends with a proposal on how Sida (and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) ought to manage the issue of so-called country programme evaluations, i.e., evaluations of Swedish cooperation strategies. The proposal takes into account the principles of the Paris Declaration, especially the partner country's interests and the need for coordination, the basic view of Swedish international development cooperation policy (the poverty focus), and the reasonable interest by Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish general public to receive information on the results of Swedish contributions in a country. The proposal is linked to the new working methodology for cooperation strategies within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida.

This is not an 'official' proposal by Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV). This is the author's proposal, although it has been discussed within UTV and has been well received. Initially, the idea was not for the work on this study to result in a tangible proposal to formulate future country programme evaluations. The assignment was only to review the experiences of country programme evaluations and to discuss briefly how common features and experiences could be made use of by Sida's evaluation activity. During the course of the work, it seemed reasonable to end the report with an idea on how we can change the way Swedish cooperation is followed up at country level and that the responsibility should preferably be moved to UTV. This is inspired in part by DFID's work on country programme evaluations and the critical conclusions of the appraisals of previous accounting for the results of operations that Sida commissioned. The proposal can also fit into a clearer reorientation against results and higher quality of results management within Sida.

² The appendix is not printed but is available to anyone who is interested.

2 Introductory discussion on country programme evaluations

Country strategies³ or country programmes are an important part of aid management. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the donors have increasingly begun to formulate their development cooperation activities as country programmes or country strategies⁴. The reason was probably that the donors increasingly based their plans on the partner countries' preferences and development plans. Arguments for the relevance of contributions were to be found in the partner country's needs and wishes, and not as before based primarily on the donors' views of what constituted suitable development projects in a country. Sweden, like other bilateral donors, had long worked with annual country allocations, so-called country frameworks, in the development assistance budget, but these were initially hardly more than summaries of the budgets of a number of projects in a recipient country. They were more of a measure of the available budget scope than the result of calculations of the costs of a unified country programme. In the worst case, the upturns and downturns of the Swedish country frames, which had long been decided by the Swedish Parliament, worked as a kind of indicator of a country's political 'suitability' rather than as an expression of the country's need for support.

A donor's overall contributions in a country are usually referred to as the donor's *country programme*. However, this is rarely or never a programme in the sense that all the parts are logically connected or intended to work together in practice. On the contrary, if anything, most 'country programmes' are an odd collection of projects and sector programmes that have come about at different times and for partly different reasons. At best, they can be motivated jointly under the heading of 'poverty reduction', but the so-called *programme theory* of doing something about poverty, i.e., the assumed causal link between intervention and effect, varies between the interventions. A more accurate term might be *contribution portfolio*, a term that is sometimes used⁵.

³ From here on, the text uses the term *country strategy* as the generic name, regardless of the country or organisation it refers to, while *cooperation strategy* refers to Swedish strategies according to the new order. The term *country programme* is used interchangeably with *strategy* and is aimed at the content of the strategy rather than the document itself. The term *country programme evaluation* is used throughout the report instead of *country evaluation* or *country strategy evaluation*.

⁴ Conway-Maxwell (1999), p 6

⁵ Sida's work methodology includes the so-called *country plan*, which forms the work programme for the coming or current calendar year and should not be confused with the strategy. Neither 'the country programme' nor the contribution portfolio is a separate document in Sida's work methodology.

Despite its limitation, the country strategy or country programme idea has led to it becoming natural to follow up contributions in a country at country level and to ask questions about the effects of the whole country programme in a country. This has come to be applied in three main ways:

- 1) The most ambitious is to look at the *combined effects* of the country programme. This is naturally also the most difficult as it becomes necessary to determine which changes result from the individual country programme – parts of or the whole programme – and not from other factors (what evaluators call the *attribution problem*).
- 2) Another approach is to examine the *cooperation process*, i.e., the creation and implementation of the country strategy, while the individual components of the country programme are evaluated separately without assessing the overall result.
- 3) A third alternative is to only look at the composition of the strategy document and the country programme, in particular to appraise *assumptions*, *consistency* and *relevance*, and to try to draw conclusions on whether the contributions were well chosen in relation to the situation at the start of the strategy period and maybe also how it has changed in the country during the implementation period.

There are no clear dividing lines between these three alternatives but the level of ambition of an evaluation differs quite a lot depending on the focus that is chosen. Each of the approaches can be motivated and is worth studying. Approach number three is the easiest in terms of methodology and resources (which does not automatically mean that it should be particularly easy), but it does not offer much with regard to country programme results. The second alternative – the strategy process – is also comparatively uncomplicated to study. This approach has the advantage that an evaluation can offer useful experiences for both parties and lessons from a process study can probably be generalised and applied to other strategy processes. Such a study provides little information on the effects of the contributions however. The first approach, which examines the total effects of the country programme, requires quite large resources and, as mentioned, there are methodological problems.

In the vast majority of cases, assessments of cooperation results by Sida and other development cooperation agencies have applied to projects, and sometimes – though to a much lesser extent – different forms of sector programmes or country programmes⁶. The development cooperation activity, with its planned economy ideological inheritance, tends to focus on planning and processes while the results, which are much more difficult to establish, have so far attracted comparatively little attention. There is a contradiction in that much work is devoted to formulating a coherent programme of support to a country while there is little interest in following it up *as a programme*.

⁶ A significant proportion of Sida's centrally conducted evaluations are so-called thematic evaluations of policies or cooperation methods, but the country dimension does not play an important role here either.

There are two main reasons for the lack of systematic and ambitious follow-up of the country strategies. The main one is that donors and receivers focus most of their interest on projects and programmes while the country programmes or country strategies attract attention mainly in connection with the development of new country strategies. The projects are simply closer to the operational activity and require more frequent supervision. The projects have the upper hand in the competition for resources. The other reason is also practical, but in a different way: it is methodologically very difficult and usually very costly to assess the effects of cooperation at macro level, and more difficult still to identify what has been achieved by an individual donor's contribution. The more ambitious approach is therefore avoided and attempts are made at simpler, summary assessments based on different kinds of sources that are more or less readily available. There may also be a third explanation, namely that the concepts of country strategy and country programme mean different things to different actors, which naturally means that views on the usefulness of country programme evaluations vary.

There is a newly awakened interest among the bilateral donors in country programme evaluations. This is probably strongly linked to the new orientation of cooperation through the Poverty Reduction Strategies⁷ and later the Rome and Paris Declarations⁸. In recent times, country programme evaluations have mostly been conducted by multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and the European Commission, but bilateral organisations such as DFID and DANIDA have now begun to conduct them again.

Interest in this sort of evaluation might be expected to be particularly great in the partner countries, i.e., among those in receipt of assistance, but if this interest exists it has not been in much evidence in the discussions on cooperation evaluations. It is possible that the partner countries feel that country programme evaluations by individual donors are too limited to be of use to them, or that the framework to accommodate such evaluations in their own country's budget and planning work is not sufficiently well developed. It is a major problem that overall evaluations such as country programme studies seem to continue to be of more interest to donors than to receivers. The so-called dialogue on development issues between donors and receivers/implementers could be developed significantly if the results at country level were given the same attention by both parties.

⁷ The so-called Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), which were introduced at the end of the 1990s, were initially really a requirement for receiving support, particularly from the World Bank and IMF. Most countries in receipt of assistance now have a PRS, and, in principle at least, this forms the basis of the focus by the OECD countries and the development banks for assistance to a country. (See also Section 8.3.1.)

⁸ *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* 2005, see Internet link in the list of references.

3 What is a country strategy?

3.1 Format

One fundamental question is of course what we mean by a country strategy or a country programme. The following section looks primarily at Swedish country strategies but it also attempts to discuss general characteristics of such documents.

The Swedish country strategy idea is to finance projects and activities that are the result of the overall view, firstly of the country's need and situation – assessed in the *country analysis* (or equivalent document) – secondly of the outcomes of previous contributions – *assessed in the results analysis/outcome assessment* (or equivalent) – and thirdly of the available Swedish resources. Most of the other donors probably have similar ideas. In practice, other considerations also play a part, e.g., what are sometimes known as Sweden's comparative advantages or Swedish interests, or that the cooperation so far within a certain sector has built up common knowledge that ought to be used. It is also in the interest of both parties to avoid jumping between different sectors as this incurs changeover costs.

The strategy document summarises these considerations and conclusions, though almost as important as the document is the process that leads to the final strategy and which lasts for approximately one year and in which a number of different stakeholders are involved.

Swedish cooperation strategies, which are decided by the government after a proposal by Sida, describe the focus of Swedish cooperation to a country or a region (group of countries) over the next five years. A strategy also specifies the approximate volume of development assistance in Swedish kronor to be given to the country during the strategy period. According to instructions by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, the document should consist of ten pages, but it is usually a couple of pages longer. The focus is usually given by pointing out a number of sectors that should receive support. The motivations are brief. The cooperation strategies also contain more analytical sections on the situation of the partner countries and describe experiences from the previous strategy period. Nowadays, the formulations of the overall goals are fairly similar for all strategies, and there are rarely any unique country-specific goals.

From the mid-1990s, a fixed procedure was established for drawing up Swedish country strategies for the most important recipient countries and specifying the focus and volume⁹. Since then, strategies have been formulated for an increasing number of countries, and there are also a number of so-called region strategies. The latter usually contain brief strategies for a group of countries with relatively little individual cooperation from Sweden as well as the focus for the support to regional programmes, e.g., within the environment area. The earlier country strategies used to apply for three years, but were to have at least a five-year perspective. The new cooperation strategies should normally apply for five years.

Currently (2006), the government has laid down Swedish cooperation strategies for approximately 50 countries and regions. (This can be compared with the beginning of the 1990s when Sweden had 18 so-called programme countries that had been decided by the Swedish Parliament.) Sida normally draws up six to eight cooperation strategy proposals every year. Much of the work is carried out at the embassies.

The Swedish country strategy work during the 1990s and up to 2005 resulted in three documents: a *country analysis* that contained a description and discussion of the country's current economic, social and political development, a *results analysis* that reported on and discussed the outcome of Swedish support, and the *country strategy* itself, usually a document of 15–25 pages. Other specialised documents have supplemented the country analysis, e.g., a poverty analysis or gender analysis. In recent years, Sweden has sometimes used other organisations' country analyses. Sida then normally assesses the usefulness for Sweden of the 'outside' country analysis.

During 2005, the procedures for Swedish country strategy work changed. The reason for the change was that Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs considered the process too unwieldy and that it was unreasonable to work for two years on a document that would only apply for a few years thereafter. In addition, greater cooperation between donors, and adaptation to the partner countries' plans would probably reduce the need and importance of the donors' specific country strategies. The proposal is summarised in a memorandum from December 2003¹⁰ and has three main points: fewer and shorter background documents, faster production of strategy (ten months instead of up to two years) and a clear shift in the main focus of the work to the embassy/field office. The last point also includes a more detailed consultation with the partner country than before. The proposal, which was largely implemented, is based on views by Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and nothing is said about possible views on the procedure by the partner countries.

⁹ Country programmes have existed in some form at Sida since the 1970s. They were initially called 'country memoranda' and later 'country programmes'. A group with members from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida drew up a new fixed procedure in connection with the creation of the 'new' Sida in 1995, and that applied until 2005. (Klas Markensten: information by email, 2006.)

¹⁰ Markensten (2003)

In the new order for cooperation strategies, which is described in detail in the manual *Sida at Work – Cooperation Strategies*, the process is simpler as the background material has become less extensive and a central part is carried out in a focused discussion on location in the country instead of via written memoranda. During this *country meeting*¹¹, at which representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and sometimes other Swedish organisations are present, the main focus and scope of Swedish cooperation are decided in consultation with the partner country. A so-called planning document consisting of a short analysis on the country's situation and the development cooperation activity in progress is written ahead of the country meeting.

Results still need to be reported. The document is no longer called 'results analysis' but 'outcome assessment', though in practice it is the same kind of document as before but shorter. The strategy document rarely contains exact goals. The outcome assessment often contains more definitive results, and it is sometimes difficult to link results/outcomes to the goals in the strategy. It therefore becomes difficult to assess the ability of the strategy to steer the implementation and unclear how observed results can affect continued cooperation in the new strategy.

The manual reinforces the impression that it is the process during the creation of the strategy that is important and not outcomes and the results appraisal, even though feedback is described as a central part of the methodology. On the whole, much of the country strategy process is about *mobilisation*, something that characterises Sida's work in general.

In a couple of Sida's evaluations on the creation of country strategy processes with regard to Vietnam and Laos, one of the conclusions was that the strategies were too general and that there was no link between the strategy and the tangible working plans for the cooperation between Sweden and the recipient. One of the reports from the evaluation with the title '*Mind the Middle*'¹² proposed that a so-called *country plan* should be drawn up and updated every year. It should make the strategies tangible and specify the time and financial resources. The proposal was implemented and the country plans can be followed up as planning instruments.

From a practical evaluation point of view, it is probably realistic to consider the cooperation strategy and country plans as a whole that together define Sweden's development cooperation programme – the country programme – for a certain country. One weakness with this view is that the country plan is intended for internal use. It is an official document, normally written in English and available to anyone who wants to see it, but Sweden and Sida do not announce their intentions of cooperation in a particular country to the country's government through the country plan.

¹¹ The country meeting should normally be held in the partner country and includes consultations with the partner country and other donors as well as internal Swedish consultations on the contents of the strategy. This should take about a week. The strategy is not decided on at the country meeting. The idea is that the main focus is decided during the meeting week.

¹² Sida Evaluation 02/37

3.2 Functions of the strategy

The strategy is the most important formal instrument to steer cooperation in a partner country. The *steering effects* of the strategy are strongest for new projects, though they are limited to the period to which they formally apply, as parts of the contribution portfolio continue into the new period. Only after a time can contributions in progress be affected, e.g., when writing a new three- or five-year project agreement. This is discussed in detail in, for example, Sida's evaluation of the strategy process in Mozambique, which looks at the possibilities of managing the manoeuvrability for adaptations and changes during the strategy period¹³. In addition to questions on steering effects, the delay leads to problems in evaluations: which strategy is being evaluated?

Even if the country plan does to some extent fill a gap in Sida's planning and follow-up of the contributions in a country, the gap is still wide open with regard to the so-called *programme theory*, i.e., how the contributions are supposed to achieve desirable, long-term results. The relevance assessment may be some kind of programme theory – the choice of sectors and contribution areas has to be motivated in some way by the country's own priorities and situation – but the arguments are rarely very clear. In this regard, the shortcoming is reinforced by the basic document, the strategy itself, which according to the new directions must be no more than ten pages. The individual contributions probably have a slightly more developed programme theory in project documents and Sida's assessment memoranda, but the composition of the country programme is not justified in these.

The country strategy idea has probably rarely or never been about identifying 'white spots' on the cooperation map and filling some 'cooperation vacuum' to which so far no development funds have found their way. Instead, the strategies have emphasised things of particular political or technical interest from a development cooperation point of view and things that the partner country has pointed out as important. With the growing consensus by the donors on basic problems and the purpose of cooperation, it is natural for most donors to flock to certain areas and mechanisms. The donors' country strategies are probably tending to become increasingly similar and they thereby lose value for the partner country; they no longer provide any important information on what separates Sweden's intentions from, for example, those of Canada or Norway. The function of the strategies is rather that of domestic policy in the donor country, and for Sweden's part they are used to inform the Swedish Parliament and the general public of Sweden's intentions with the cooperation to a particular country. This tendency will probably become stronger if the strategy process is denied nourishment in the form of evaluations and critical results assessments and instead is only stimulated by constant repeated declarations of intent on how it ought to be and the goals of the contributions.

¹³ See also Section 5.1.

The Swedish cooperation strategies are formal documents only from a Swedish point of view. The strategies are the Swedish government's instructions to Sida and other Swedish public actors within cooperation. They are not contracts specifying undertakings by Sweden to the partner country. They normally result in a *development cooperation agreement* that specifies the focus of sectors and describes the duties and rights of the two parties in general terms. Through the strategy, other interested parties can find out about Sweden's view of the partner country and the conclusions on the focus of Swedish support. The fact that the strategy is of great importance as a source of information is also shown by it often being published in English or another suitable language such as Spanish or French.

There is vagueness in the strategy idea that has to do with the strategy being both a document and a collection of contributions ('contribution portfolio') and at the same time a process to identify and decide on tangible contributions. This vagueness will cause problems for any future evaluations.

If the strategies 'only' exist for information, there is hardly any need to evaluate goal fulfilment. For the 'follow up' it would be possible to just report to the partner country and other donors on the practical implementation of the contributions and the amount of money spent.

On the other hand, as control instruments and possibly also as a basis for dialogue, the cooperation strategies are highly suitable for evaluation and assessment of results and goal fulfilment. There may be an exception here: if the main aim of the strategy is to serve as a basis for dialogue on certain issues, e.g., human rights, an evaluation is strictly speaking not required. The strategy has served its purpose if it has been used in its capacity as a declaration of intention in the dialogue. If, however, the dialogue is seen as a cooperation instrument, among many other instruments, it is another matter: the dialogue form can be evaluated in a method or process evaluation and in an impact evaluation that looks for results.

If we summarise the functions of the country strategies they may provide:

- information to the country (and laterally to other development cooperation agencies)
- a basis for dialogue (formulate policy direction)
- a steering instrument and plan for overall Swedish cooperation to a country
- a decision basis for the partner country (and laterally)

The type of document that the country strategy is considered to be is therefore decisive to the issue of the value of the country strategy or the country programme evaluations. Is it a pure declaration of intention that is primarily intended as information and possibly a basis for the so-called dialogue, or should it be taken as a tangible action programme that can be followed up and for which the goal fulfilment can be evaluated?

4 About methodology

All country programme evaluations¹⁴ combine different approaches and data collecting methods. Those evaluations that are aimed at results and effects try to achieve their aim by putting the material into a bigger, national context. It is comparatively rare for survey-like investigations to be carried out solely for the country programme evaluation, instead they use mostly existing material from official statistics, reports and summaries from the implementation of different interventions as well as evaluations of projects and programmes that are normally available to some extent.

The primary material that is collected in a country programme evaluation normally consists mostly of interviews with stakeholders in the partner country. These stakeholders may form part of the target group of a programme, be employees in a project, employees at the donor's country office or head office, government officials and politicians in the partner country, or local experts. The choice of stakeholders is rarely systematic in a statistical sense and is usually based on personal contacts and an assessment of whether the person is knowledgeable about the development cooperation agency's activity in the partner country. In a more ambitious form, these stakeholder interviews can become a relatively systematic *perception study*. Different kinds of field visits and direct observations by the evaluation team constitute another form of primary material for the evaluation.

There are also country programme evaluations with a purely macro-economic approach based on official or specially collected statistics. Swedish examples are SAU's studies at the start of the 1990s (see Section 5.1 below). The aim of such an evaluation is very ambitious, namely to determine the development effects of the cooperation. Unfortunately, the methodological problems have so far been too great to offer any definitive conclusions on the effects of such evaluations.

When different kinds of material are combined, it is usual to talk about *triangulation*, a term borrowed from cartography and land surveying. The aim of triangulation within land surveying is to improve the precision of observations and descriptions. The idea within the evaluation activity is that different kinds of material on similar subjects support each other (the term 'validation' is sometimes used) and make the conclusions more reliable. Careful preparation work and a critical attitude to the material are required by the evaluators if this is to succeed.

¹⁴ The discussion in this paper is primarily about country programme evaluation with the focus on results and effects, not process evaluations.

As forms of support are very different and very often concern matters that cannot easily be measured in simple dimensions and with numerical methods, many development cooperation agencies use some form of rating or scoring to measure the results, quality and sometimes risk of failure. The grading should make it possible to express the success or problems of a group of contributions or the contributions in a complete country programme. This can be done by programme officers, possibly in consultation with the cooperation partner, or by external consultants. Such assessments are naturally very useful for a country programme evaluation, but lists with points alone do not an evaluation make; that also requires an analysis of cause and effect, and knowledge of how a country programme works together with other forces in society.

Country programme evaluations can naturally contain many sources of error. The conclusions of such an evaluation are usually based on assessments of changes rather than on clearly measurable effects, with the causal links also becoming assessments. Those who use such a report must form their own opinion of the validity of the reasoning and the reliability of the empirical material. This is not something strange or unique: humanistic sciences such as history and literature rarely work with numerical methods. By openly reporting sources, discussing possible errors and using evaluators who are independent of the interventions being evaluated, it is possible to reduce the errors and make it easier for decision-makers and the general public to take a stand on the value of the results. There is probably also a decreasing marginal rate of return with regard to higher costs for a big evaluation and better accuracy, but that relationship is hardly linear. When an evaluation is drawn up, it is necessary to decide on the minimum amount of resources that are necessary for reasonably reliable data and what can be achieved with more data and a more thorough analysis.

5 Swedish country programme evaluations

5.1 Implemented evaluations

Sweden has only carried out a few country programme evaluations, and those that have been carried out have taken very different approaches. It may seem like a paradox that so few country programme evaluations have been carried out, as Sweden has argued strongly, not least in discussions with the European Commission during the 1990s, in favour of the value of country strategies, i.e., for a unified view of the contributions in a partner country and for feedback between results and objectives.

Two kinds of country programme evaluations were carried out in the years 1993–94, two by Sida and four by SAU¹⁵, all principally to show results and effects. In the years 1991–92, Sida carried out process evaluations of cooperation with some countries in Africa and Asia and of the formulation and implementation of the country strategies. These were carried out first and foremost with a view to learning.

The approach by the latter group of evaluations was largely determined by a study of ‘evaluability’, i.e., an analysis of methodological and theoretical possibilities and limitations of country programme evaluations, which Sida’s Department for Evaluation commissioned in 1999¹⁶. In the study, the authors expressed, with reference to the conclusions from DAC’s conference in 1999 on country programme evaluations¹⁷, that if such an evaluation was at all possible it would be far too costly and too complicated to be worth the effort. The evaluations that were then carried out by Sida were therefore aimed at the strategy process and at the relevance and coherence of the programmes.

The two evaluations by Sida in 1993 and 1994¹⁸ concerned the overall cooperation to Botswana and Lesotho respectively over 20 years. The approach, which was carried out partly by the same evaluation team, had a historic focus, and the main problem concerned the issue of relevance: in light of the results, was the composition of the country portfolio and the implementation

¹⁵ SAU, also known by the English abbreviation SASDA, Secretariat for Analysis of Swedish Development Assistance, was part of the government committee for analysis of development cooperation and worked for two years, 1993–94. See Ds 1994:137.

¹⁶ Catterson et al (1999)

¹⁷ DAC (1999)

¹⁸ Sida Evaluation Report 1994:2 and 1994:3

methods right for Swedish cooperation to the respective country during this long period? The method involved relating the focus and methodology of Swedish development cooperation projects to the countries' development situation during different periods after independence and trying to assess if the cooperation was 'right' in relation to the country's needs and recipient capacity during the respective period. The conclusions were mostly positive, especially with regard to Botswana. The method was interesting but was based mainly on assessments and impressions rather than numerically measurable variables. Another limitation is that it can only be used for long periods, at least 15–20 years.

SAU's evaluations applied to four countries: Tanzania, Zambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nicaragua¹⁹. The aim was to try to determine whether the Swedish cooperation had made any significant difference to development in each of the four countries. The approach was macroeconomic. The method basically involved the use of a regression analysis to look for a link between development funds as an additional resource and possible positive changes in a number of macroeconomic variables. The conclusions were not definitive and it proved almost impossible to identify the contribution of Swedish cooperation to economic development, partly because of the poor quality of the statistical material and partly due to external factors, the effects of which were too difficult to separate from the cooperation.

The process evaluations applied to Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique, as well as Laos and Vietnam. (The Laos and Vietnam evaluations were mentioned earlier in Section 2.) The evaluations in East Africa and Mozambique are typical process evaluations and the Mozambique evaluation, in particular, goes deep into the country strategy work. The evaluations are based on detailed document studies and interviews with representatives of the partner countries and Sida.

Both evaluations assess how effective the country strategy was at governing the Swedish development cooperation programme to the respective country and whether in reality they are used as management tools. The conclusion of both evaluations is that the country strategy does not work as intended. According to the Tanzania evaluation, the strategy has 'affected' but not governed the country programme, and according to the Mozambique evaluation, the effect that has been found has been inconsistent: contributions that should have ended have been allowed to continue and new contributions that are not mentioned in the strategy have been started during the strategy period.

The evaluations also examine the other two documents that were then formally part of the country strategy: the country analysis and the results analysis. The Mozambique evaluation asks why the excellent country analysis was not allowed to affect the country programme to a greater extent and feels

¹⁹ The reports are listed in SAU's final report Ds 1994:137 *Studier av bistånd*

that there is no full explanation of the differences between the conclusions of the analysis and the focus of the country programme. The Tanzania evaluation on the other hand establishes that accounting for the results of the operations clearly affected the strategy (but at the same time, the authors ask if this really was good, as the results analysis was not particularly well carried out).

The Mozambique evaluation discusses the function and content of the country strategy process and feels that it is important to reach a consensus on a development cooperation programme. According to the authors, the process in Mozambique was also successful because it offered opportunities for different views in the partner country to emerge. Their definite opinion is that a formulated strategy is necessary to make the Swedish viewpoints more concrete. This also applies when there is close cooperation with the recipient country and other donors.

In this context, the Mozambique evaluation brings up Sida's institutional culture and feels that the organisation's tendency not to let conflicts come to the surface but to be 'absorbed', its 'verbal tradition' – important discussions are not documented – and the tendency of staff to ignore certain decisions are important explanations for the poor manoeuvrability of the strategy.

The discussion on the programme theory behind the strategy, which the report calls 'assumptions', is particularly interesting in the Mozambique evaluation. The conclusions are formulated as follows²⁰:

'The strategy contains a number of implicit assumptions about the links between objectives and the strategy/programme. These links between Swedish objectives and alternatives chosen or dropped are not spelt out. Reading the strategy it is not possible to really know why certain areas for action were chosen and others not.'

'By not stating the alternatives and the assumptions made in choosing certain alternatives over others, the strategy does not become the strategic tool envisaged. Making assumptions about linkages explicit also makes it easier to entertain alternatives and test assumptions against reality.'

These Sida evaluations are good examples of valuable process evaluations. They do not state anything about the results of contributions or country programmes, but they provide knowledge about political and administrative processes in the cooperation, which are also useful when deciding on approaches and methods for more results-oriented country programme evaluations.

The Botswana and Lesotho evaluations filled an accounting function by reporting on the use of the aid and its long-term effects. They also formulated conclusions and lessons, but they are the only real country programme evalu-

²⁰ The quotations are taken from a summary of the evaluation in *Sida Evaluations Newsletter* no 3/01.

ations that Sida has conducted. Sida therefore has no experiences of its own to build on when it comes to unified, results-oriented country programme evaluations, even if it has produced a large number of reports on the results of operations for more than 10 years.

5.2 Country programme evaluations and results assessments in the current cooperation process

Although evaluation is mentioned as a possibility in the manual for country strategies published in 2005²¹, there is no requirement or recommendation for this to be done. As in the earlier procedure for country strategies and as mentioned in the previous section, there are requirements to account for the results of the operation. The manual contains an appendix with the heading *Outcome assessment*, which describes how results should be followed up²².

The results analysis that should be carried out one way or another and which should be the most important form of follow-up of the country strategy for Sweden has not proved to be as good as would have been wished. Several appraisals²³, the most recent one by the Swedish National Financial Management Authority in 2004, show that the results analyses have varied greatly in quality, are conducted very differently, and appear to have little or insignificant influence on country strategies in the period that follows. According to the order that applies to the Swedish country strategy process from 2005, an *outcome assessment* should be carried out. This is normally based on available material and not automatically on independent evaluations²⁴.

It is clear in the manual that the Swedish country strategy procedure emphasises the cooperation and implementation process and attaches much greater importance to situation descriptions and analyses of conditions than to results. The manual states that the outcome assessment should not 'be limited to a narrow account of whether the goals laid down for Swedish support have been met'²⁵. The directions are contradictory and appear difficult to follow with regard to the many delicate questions the evaluation should answer. The level of ambition is high: not only should it provide results but also explanations as to why this has, or possibly has not, happened. At the same time, the report should be very brief, just a few pages, and no special requirements for the quality of the basic data are given. That equation does not add up, and there is a risk that the outcome assessment evaluations will continue to have the same weaknesses as the earlier results analyses.

²¹ There are evaluations in the diagram on page 6 of the manual, but not in the rest of the text.

²² See footnote 6 above.

²³ Schill, 1996 and 2001; Swedish National Financial Management Authority 2004.

²⁴ Sida (2005). Sida at work. *Manual for the preparation, implementation and follow-up of cooperation strategies.*

²⁵ a a, page 36

Sida's Review Committee on Cooperation Strategies²⁶ has established that the scope and quality of the outcome assessments vary greatly, though the evaluation group has not made any systematic comparisons of them. One impression is that it is very unclear how earlier results have affected the focus ahead of a new strategy period.

²⁶ An internal quality assurance mechanism. The Review Committee (GK) comments on strategy drafts and acts as advisor to Sida's Director-General ahead of decisions on proposals to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

6 Country programme evaluations by different donors²⁷

6.1 Country programme evaluations by the European Commission

The European Commission evaluates its country programmes extensively and ambitiously. The Commission evaluates all country programmes, and this is an expressed requirement by the member countries. The evaluations normally consist of both an *ex post* analysis of the long-term effects of implemented or ongoing contributions and an (partly) *ex ante* analysis of the relevance of the ongoing strategy. The aim is to evaluate all areas in which the Commission gives support to a country and to examine whether ‘the goals have been met, the intended effects have been achieved and it has been done in the most efficient way’²⁸.

The Commission’s development support is based on an extensive political framework, which is used as a point of departure for overall evaluation issues. This means that the country programme evaluations try to show results at policy level and at country programme level. The European Commission’s assistance carries quite a lot of political weight due to its size – the Commission is usually one of the biggest donors in a partner country – and because there are political conditions for the support. The Commission’s assistance is also linked to measures in the field of trade policy and the evaluations are therefore also of political importance among member states in Europe.

A typical country programme evaluation report starts with an analysis of current and previous²⁹ country strategies and points out possible shortcomings. The report also discusses any political problems and conditions of the programme. Most of the work on an evaluation is carried out by independent consultants.

²⁷ More detailed reports on different donors’ country strategy evaluations are available in a separate, not printed, appendix.

²⁸ The EU Commission’s country programme evaluations for Malawi 2003 and Ethiopia 2004 are used as sources in this section. In the reference list: *EC, Europe Aid (2003)* and *EC, Europe Aid (2004)*.

²⁹ The previous country strategy must be included, as there is usually a delay in the effect of a change in focus. A normal project runs for many years, and a project that starts during a strategy period normally ends during the next period.

Afterwards, each country programme evaluation is examined and rated, usually by the person managing the evaluation. The assessment looks at matters such as whether the evaluation corresponds to the needs of the client and agrees with the assignment description, whether the collected data are of good quality, the validity seems reasonable, the recommendations appear useful and the report is well written.

A typical country programme evaluation by the European Commission costs 1.5–2 million SEK and takes in the region of one year.

6.2 Country programme evaluations by the World Bank

According to the World Bank, country programme evaluations are an important instrument to manage the bank's activity. It stresses that the country programmes are the backbone of the bank's work and that the transition from project thinking at the start of the 1990s was a very big step towards a method of working that assumes ownership by the cooperating governments.

The World Bank assesses three aspects of its activity in a country:

- the total outcome of the bank's programme of support,
- the effects on the development of the countries' institutions, and
- the sustainability of the different programmes.

It is very clear that these are *assessments*, which is indicated by the conclusions for the programme as a whole being expressed in terms such as 'satisfactory', 'moderately successful' and similar or, for sustainability, by 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely'. A system of project rating exists for all activities the bank supports in a country.

In a 'self-evaluation' published in spring 2005, the World Bank's evaluation department³⁰ summarises the experiences from 25 country programme evaluations and raises method issues, evaluations on the usability of the studies and lessons for the activity. The main impression of the report is that the Bank's country programme evaluations are a highly bank-centred activity. The interviews on usability, which were conducted with staff at management level, deal with problems of critical reports upsetting relations with the partner country and causing problems for the bank staff's position. The lessons are about possible changes in the bank's way of working and very little about which lessons can be useful to the partner countries.

At a UNDP conference on country programme evaluations in 2004 (see Section 7.2 below), the World Bank's spokesman said that the conclusions from about a third of the Bank's approximately 70 country programme evalua-

³⁰ World Bank/OED (2005).

tions point to the lack of a link between the evaluation of the effects of the country programmes as a whole and the aggregated result of individual projects that have been financed by the bank. According to the spokesman, this appears to show that the bank has neglected important aspects of its support and that some projects have probably not noticed obstacles to achieving tangible development results.

Evaluations of Country Assistance Programs (CAS) are not carried out in every country where the Bank is active but an overall follow-up mechanism – the CAS completion report – is used. This is prepared by the country department towards the end of a country strategy period. These completion reports are then reviewed by IEG, the World Bank's evaluation department, which writes a short report with the aim of assess the quality of the completion reports. Normally no additional information is sought and the review is based on existing written material.

The World Bank's country programme evaluations normally take 12–18 months to carry out and cost on average 250,000 USD, with 125,000 USD as the lowest and 500,000 USD as the highest cost.

6.3 Country programme evaluations by the Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The formulation of ADB's evaluations is similar in many respects to the World Bank's country programme evaluations, but they also differ on a number of points³¹. CAPE (*Country Assistance Programme Evaluation*) has been an established part of ADB's evaluation activity since 1998.

ADB's evaluation department uses the term 'thrust' and proposes this as a collective term and 'analysis unit' for the direction and strength of the bank's contributions within a sector. This is a slightly odd term, but it illustrates a striving for an overall view and an analysing attitude to the evaluations.

The aim of the evaluations is clear: they are needed for accounting and learning. They should evaluate, attempt to explain the results and offer conclusions and recommendations on future operations in a partner country. The evaluations should be aimed at the bank's management as well as the stakeholders in the partner country, and they should form the basis of the Bank's country strategy and country programme for the following five-year period.

The country strategy is normally based on the partner country's development goals, and the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) should form the basis of the evaluation according to the guidelines. The bank stresses

³¹ The guidelines from ADB that form the basis of the following description are partly discursive, and they discuss the difficulties of determining causal links and how these problems should be handled. Asian Development Bank (2006).

three ‘pillars’ of poverty reduction, and these do of course become the focus of the evaluation: *‘pro-poor sustainable growth, inclusive social development and good governance’*. In addition, five so-called common issues should be included, namely gender, environment, private sector development, regional cooperation and capacity development.

In the analysis of the results, ADB, like the World Bank, wants to relate the outcome to a situation where there has not been an intervention (‘the contra-factual’). The view is that it is difficult to find good examples of this in country programme evaluations carried out so far, but that there are cases when a tangible contra-factual situation has been described with the help of a group of experts in the field.

A typical country programme evaluation within ADB is expected to take 9–12 months, and the guidelines state that planning ought to start approximately 2 years before the new strategy is drawn up.

6.4 Country programme evaluations by UNDP

UNDP’s country programme evaluations, under its own term of *Assessment of Development Results* (ADR), have been conducted in their current form since 2002. During the period 2002–06, 16 evaluations were published, and the view is that the approach and methods that were used work well.

The purpose of the evaluations is described in an internal manual (UNDP 2002): to clarify what UNDP’s activity in the country has added – usually known as ‘added value’ – and if it has the right strategic focus to contribute to future development. The evaluations should focus on outcomes and not try to establish the long-term impact. The manual also stresses that it is a matter of looking for ‘very likely’ links between UNDP’s efforts and observed results, not to establish definite causal links.

The level of ambition of UNDP’s country programme evaluations is thus modest, and the resources needed are also relatively small. The whole evaluation should take 2–3 months in working time (but 9–12 months in calendar time) and the evaluation team should normally consist of 4–6 members. The evaluations are regarded as taking longer than is desirable and as being too expensive (the average cost is 130,000 USD) however.

6.5 Country programme evaluations by DANIDA

During 2006, DANIDA carried out an evaluation of 20 years of cooperation with Uganda. The organisation of the work was quite ambitious and the process was characterised by long-term cooperation with the country’s authorities. This is probably one of the few, and so far maybe the only, bilateral country programme evaluation carried out in which the partner country has had significant influence on the formulation and implementation of the eval-

uation. The evaluation took just over one year and the total cost is approximately 4.1 MSEK.

The formulation of the evaluation was strongly influenced by the discussion on 'Total ODA' that was carried out within DAC's evaluation network³², which, in principle, means accepting the problems of identifying the Danish contribution in increasingly coordinated cooperation yet still trying to get an idea of the 'added value' from the Danish contribution. The evaluation puts strong emphasis on studying capacity building as a special issue in addition to the more usual evaluation issues of economic development and poverty reduction. It is also interesting to note that the dialogue issues are raised as a separate subject.

An adapted variant of the 'Uganda model' is applied to evaluations of country programmes in Ghana and Benin in 2007. In Ghana, DANIDA cooperates with the National Development Planning Commission and in Benin with L'Observatoire du changement social.

DANIDA's experiences of the Uganda evaluation³³ show that it is possible to conduct an extensive country programme evaluation within a reasonable period of time and for it to be well received by different stakeholders. These country programme evaluations are conducted as a kind of conclusion or summary of the mainly bilateral cooperation. In the future, joint evaluations are expected within the framework of Joint Assistance Strategies.

6.6 Country programme evaluations by DFID

DFID began a series of country programme evaluations in 2003, largely as a result of a report by the British National Audit Office (NAO)³⁴. In its report, NAO suggested that the end of cycle review, which is normally drawn up at the end of a country strategy period and summarises results and implementation, ought to be replaced by country programme evaluations. The responsibility should also be moved from those with country responsibility in London and the field offices to DFID's evaluation department. The reason was that well worked-out evaluations would probably work better and be more reliable than routine final reports as a basis for considerations on the future focus of support to a country.

These end of cycle reviews probably correspond in part to Sida's outcome assessments and, as in Sida's appraisals of earlier results analyses, NAO confirmed that the impact of the final reports on future programmes was unclear.

After a trial run of three evaluations, DFID implemented five country programme evaluations during 2005–06: in Rwanda, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Malawi and Ghana. These are termed 'light evaluations', which means that

³² See Section 8.3.2 below

³³ Email from DANIDA's evaluation department 31 January 2007

³⁴ National Audit Office (2002)

the method is based on available material and is supplemented by interviews with stakeholders over a couple of weeks in the partner country. No new empirical studies are conducted for the country programme evaluation. With regard to time and the level of ambition, they are similar to UNDP's country programme evaluations (see Section 6.4 above). DFID intends to conduct approximately five country programme evaluations per year.

The advantages and limitations of the method are described in a synthesis report that summarises the five country programme evaluations as follows³⁵:

'The evidence for each CPE is collected from three main sources: (i) reviews of programme documents and file correspondence, as made available by DFID to the consultant team; (ii) interviews with past and present DFID staff; and (iii) interviews with officials in government, with partners in other development agencies, and from representatives of NGOs and civil society organisations.'

'This "light-touch methodology", as it has been termed, is however constrained in several ways. The limited number of performance reviews and evaluation reports available means that the individual CPEs are not meta-evaluations (i.e. not evaluations solely based on extant project and programme reviews). Furthermore, projects or programmes were not visited in the field, and primary data collection was not undertaken. Additional analytical studies were not commissioned in association with the CPE.'

*'The CPEs are however more than a collection of stakeholder perspectives, and include analysis and supporting evidence wherever appropriate. They focus extensively on the CSPs and CAPs as statements of DFID's public intention and strategy – and judge performance against DFID's own objectives for each country. The value of the CPEs lies in the way that they capture the external perspectives of DFID's development partners (donors, national government, civil society) – as well as the judgements of independent evaluators.'*³⁶

Whether DFID's new evaluations are more useful than the end of cycle reports that they are going to replace is impossible for an outsider to assess, but their strength is that they are likely to be more reliable with the evaluation department as the client and independent consultants as evaluators.

DFID's internal evaluation manual³⁷ also mentions a new type of country programme evaluation, *Country Development Evaluation*. Judging from the description, its aim is to summarise available information on earlier contributions and results and the flow of aid to the country. It should be led by the partner country and be formulated with a partner country perspective. No examples of such an evaluation exist yet.

³⁵ DFID (2006), p 5

³⁶ Meanings of abbreviations: CPE = Country Programme Evaluation; CSP = Country Strategy Paper; CAP = Country Assistance Plan.

³⁷ DFID (2005)

7 Overviews and analyses

Below is a fairly detailed account of two written analyses and one conference on country programme evaluations. The reviews are reported here as they raise definitions and approaches and also discuss whether country programme evaluations are worth the effort.

7.1 DAC Vienna 1999

So far, the most comprehensive analysis of country programme evaluations was conducted by Tim Conway and Simon Maxwell at the British ODI as a background document for the DAC conference on country programme evaluations in Vienna in 1999. They called it a ‘state of the art review’ and examined more than a hundred evaluations during 1989–99. Most of these were produced over the five-year period 1995–99 with a peak of 31 reports in 1998.

There was great variation with regard to the formulation and approach of the evaluations, and the authors believe that a strict definition of country programme evaluations is not possible. Instead they discuss where the boundaries should be drawn for a country programme evaluation. In addition to studies that clearly assess the whole development cooperation programme from a donor to a certain country, the authors include the following ‘borderline cases’:

- evaluations of all contributions in a country from a donor even if they are a disparate collection of projects rather than a coherent programme,
- evaluations of a significant part of a donor’s country contributions for case studies to assess a particular cooperation method or cooperation channel for the donor³⁸,
- shorter, internal documents aimed at processes and systems, if they have been implemented systematically according to established guidelines within the donor organisation.

Conway and Maxwell analysed the material under three headings: *motivation* for and use of country programme evaluations, *scope and coverage* of the study and *methodological issues*. The main motivation was that the evaluation was seen as a logical consequence of bilateral donors and development cooperation agencies such as the World Bank having largely gone over to unified programmes or country strategies as a working method. Few donors applied country programme evaluations routinely; most had carried out one or two as a kind of experiment.

³⁸ It seems unjustified to include this category if the purpose of a country programme evaluation is to examine a country strategy.

An important reason not to continue was that the donor countries clearly considered them too costly. In particular Norway, which conducted 10 studies between 1985 and 1990 at a cost of 150,000–350,000 USD each and found them too expensive in relation to their usefulness and that they took too long to complete. The Netherlands³⁹ had similar experiences. Its country programme evaluations took 2–3 years to implement and cost 700,000–900,000 USD each at the end of the 1990s.

The donors' primary motivation for country programme evaluations was similar, but there were many different reasons for individual evaluations. Firstly, these were to *describe* what the country programme as a whole had achieved (*performance*) or to compare sectors and implementation methods within the programme. Secondly, the motivation could be to *explain* the results of the whole programme in relation to, for example, the political conditions or the focus of the programme in relation to the poverty goal. A third motivation was that the evaluation should provide *recommendations* for ways in which the results could be improved.

There is an interesting compilation of the programme goals against which the studies are evaluated. Conway and Maxwell divide the goals into individual project goals, country programme goals and organisation (cooperation) goals. All of the examined evaluations discuss the country programme goals, 88% individual project/sector goals and a third overall cooperation goals. Most are thus aimed at both project goals and country programme goals.

Assessing the extent to which country programme goals are achieved creates intricate problems on causal links and attribution. In this context, the authors discuss the issue of *fungibility* with reference to a then fresh report from the World Bank, which claimed that a donor-funded project primarily creates scope for the partner country to carry out further tasks. In reality, the resources that are put in often apply to *something other* than the project that nominally receives the money. With reference to this, Conway and Maxwell feel that it is even more important to carry out country programme evaluations:

'...if aid fungibility is as prevalent as the World Bank suggests, this adds theoretical weight to the conclusion that country programme evaluation is important.' (a a, page 44)

The most important aspect is of course which criteria are used in the evaluations. The most common ones given are DAC's five criteria: effectiveness, impact, relevance, sustainability and efficiency⁴⁰. Conway and Maxwell make two comments on this. One refers to the suitability of DAC's criteria for country programme evaluations; the other is that the definitions of these criteria are not completely unambiguous:

³⁹ Verbal information 2005 from staff at the evaluation department of the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁰ There is no established Swedish translation of this list of criteria.

‘There is a considerable slippage under each of the criteria headings: what one CPE⁴¹ classifies as impact another regards as effectiveness. – Some of these problems reflect translation issues. – It is necessary to examine each agency’s own definition of the terms as there is in most cases room for debate about whether a given item should be regarded as (for example) an immediate objective or an overreaching goal.’⁴²

Despite these shortcomings, Conway and Maxwell feel that the DAC criteria are useful and that they ought to be used to define the scope and coverage of the evaluations. According to the authors, the effects at sector and project level are easier to assess, as the links become clearer. Using a number of case studies as a basis for a summary rating of the country programme is obviously down to the representativeness of the cases, which becomes a question of judgement, as it is unlikely that a random sample can be made.

The matter is further complicated if the previously mentioned argument on the fungibility of the development cooperation funds is accepted. As Conway and Maxwell say: ‘If this understanding of the aid processes is accepted, not only impact but also efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and sustainability become hard to define and measure.’⁴³ In the absence of numerically measurable indicators, the focus of the evaluation moves towards the way human capital develops as opposed to physical capital. According to the authors, that kind of evaluation is better suited to qualitative than quantitative methods. In order to work with figures, the method has to assign subjective points according to some scale rather than using objective measurements.

The overview of the country programme evaluations ends with a number of recommendations for ways in which country programme evaluations should be carried out. To sum up, the recommendations are:

- specify a clear purpose (e.g. if the evaluation is to be used for decisions ahead of future country programmes, for general learning, etc),
- clearly specify the goals that are being evaluated and the criteria for a successful or failed country programme,
- define comparison objects as far as possible; these can be found in, for example, other countries’ evaluations,
- a country programme evaluation does not necessarily have to include primary data collection, but justify practical limitations with regard to time, costs, available data, etc,
- the evaluation team must include members from the partner country and the evaluation must be led jointly by the donor and the recipient country,

⁴¹ CPE = Country Programme Evaluation

⁴² Conway-Maxwell (1999), p 53

⁴³ a a, p 60

- a country programme evaluation must, as far as possible, include consultations with stakeholders,
- reporting and follow-up of the evaluation should be defined in advance.

7.2 The UNDP conference in New York, November 2004

The latest, big conference on country programme evaluations was arranged by the UNDP's evaluation office in autumn 2004 in New York⁴⁴. The purpose of the conference was partly to summarise experiences from UNDP's own country programme evaluations – known as *Assessment of Development Results* (ADR)⁴⁵ – and partly to compare experiences from similar evaluations by other development cooperation agencies. Unlike DAC's conference in Vienna, there was no compilation and analysis of a selection of evaluations as background documents, instead the participants, who came from some 10 UN organisations and development banks and a few bilateral donors,⁴⁶ made brief contributions of their experiences. A few people with a background in development research also took part in the discussion.

The conference illustrated, in a constructive way, a number of key problems concerning country programme evaluations. Firstly, there are the difficulties of identifying an individual organisation's contribution to development in a country, i.e., its 'added value', and that is of course the familiar attribution problem, which with greater donor coordination has become even more difficult to solve. Secondly, there are major methodological problems with these evaluations; these are primarily concerned with weighing up the pros and cons of numerically measurable data and more or less subjective assessments. Thirdly, there are questions on the usefulness of country programme evaluations and for whom they are of value.

An important justification for the bilateral organisations' country programme evaluations has been a striving to report on the use and benefit of the cooperation to the donor countries' own taxpayers. The increasing coordination and integration of cooperation with the partner countries' own plans and implementation make it increasingly difficult to find out the effects of contributions by an individual donor however. Maybe it is now also less relevant as after the Paris and Rome Declarations it should preferably not be possible to separate the cooperation from the partner country's own activities. It was hardly surprising that one of the conclusions of the conference was:

⁴⁴ UNDP, Evaluation Office (2004)

⁴⁵ See Section 6.4 above

⁴⁶ The report's author took part in the conference.

‘...establishing attribution of an agency’s development results is at best tenuous. Most agencies are moving towards identifying plausible association or contribution of their support to development outcomes. – Many agreed that the most an agency can do is to build enabling environments – conditions – for a country to chart and pursue its development strategies.’

The ambition is therefore lowered and instead of determining the cause and effect, *likely* links or *contributions* to development effects are looked for.

With efficiently coordinated cooperation, between the donors to a sector and between the donors and partner countries, it becomes meaningless to try to determine whose resources are leading to development results. Even if a sector or big project is dominated by one donor, it is often not possible to be certain of the reasons for an observed change, as desirable changes take time or because many uncontrollable outside factors affect the events. In this situation, many development cooperation agencies have chosen to work with assessments, so-called *rating* or *scoring* of their contributions. Although the assessments are basically subjective, they are based on fairly well-developed criteria. They are often supported by some form of ‘triangulation’, i.e., other types of information about the same interventions. The conference’s conclusion on this was:

‘There is a continuum from country evaluations that substantiate their findings primarily on empirical evidence and quantitative data (World Bank, IADB) to those that are preponderantly based on qualitative judgement and perception (UNDP, Sida⁴⁷ and UNICEF). Agencies balance these two sources differently.’

With regard to usefulness, the conference established that the country programme evaluations were originally mostly a result of the donor’s interest in seeing whether it implemented relevant and effective cooperation, though the partner country’s interests and its citizens’ reasonable demands for information on the effects of the cooperation should become increasingly important as a justification for country programme evaluations. One big problem is that there is usually not a good way for the partner country to make political and administrative use of the information that is produced by the country programme evaluations. Another problem is that the country programme evaluations require resources and attention by the partner country, and it becomes difficult if many donors carry out their own big country programme evaluations. One way of dealing with this is to conduct joint evaluations where the donors and partner countries cooperate. On these issues, the conference participants were less sure:

⁴⁷ This probably refers to the Botswana and Lesotho evaluations (see Section 5.1 above).

‘There was general consensus about benefits of joint evaluations – i.e. in giving voice to national stakeholders on a donor’s performance, and reducing costs. But there was a strong call to maintain a diversity of approaches to development support and evaluation. – While some strongly advocated for embedding evaluation in the national context, and facilitating the active participation of national actors in evaluations, others justified the need for the agency to undertake the evaluation of its own.’

The UNDP conference confirmed that there is great interest among donors in carrying out country programme evaluations. The interest appears to be particularly great among the multilateral organisations: the development banks and the UN family. The bilateral organisations were not as convinced, with one reason being the cost.

7.3 SDC’s overview 2006 of four countries’ country programme evaluations

In spring 2006, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) conducted an overview of country programme evaluations at DANIDA, DFID, SDC and Sida⁴⁸. The organisations were chosen based on their size not differing too much from that of SDC, and the World Bank, for example, was therefore not included. The aim was to reflect on SDC’s way of implementing country programme evaluations in relation to other donors’ practice and to give recommendations on the formulation of future country programme variations within SDC. The study is justified by the changes within cooperation methodology in the form of sector programme support, budget support, etc. It consists of comparisons based on 15 reports from the period 2001–06 and results from a questionnaire to the 4 organisations. It also contains a compilation of the costs of the country programme evaluations.

The study is the only reasonably comprehensive appraisal of country programme evaluation reports since Conway-Maxwell’s review in 1999. In many ways it reflects the ambivalence in the approach and level of ambition that has resulted from increased coordination and harmonisation of the cooperation, something that also emerged during the UNDP Conference in New York in 2004.

The report confirms first and foremost that there is not any high degree of ‘harmonisation’ between reports and that there are also variations in the terminology even if most use DAC’s evaluation criteria. The countries that carry out long series of country programme evaluations, especially DFID, have highly standardised assignment descriptions and a very similar approach, independent of the country.

⁴⁸ Zürcher-Walther (2006)

According to the SDC appraisal, the analysis in the reports was dominated by issues of relevance and results. Long-term sustainability and efficiency were discussed very little or not at all, and the organisations' costs for managing the country programmes were not raised either, other than in exceptional cases. Most of the evaluations were limited to the longer programmed assistance, and humanitarian assistance, for example, was rarely included.

SDC's evaluation showed up apparent problems in many evaluations of comparing plans with outcomes, as the basic material varied greatly and the goals and indicators were sometimes unclear in their formulations. Further problems were caused by the country programmes sometimes being changed during the implementation period and such changes not always resulting in clear reformulations of goals. According to the authors, the evaluations therefore took on more of the character of a *mid-term review* than an evaluation.

The authors are dubious about the empirical material and feel that it 'does not meet scientific standards'⁴⁹. An interesting observation is that some evaluations contained stakeholder interviews with 100–300 people who were predominantly government employees and donor staff, and there were rarely any interviews from the private sector or individual organisations. The small number from the latter category is remarkable, as many country strategies emphasise the importance of civil society in the development process.

According to the report, SDC's country programme evaluations cost 50,000–80,000 EUR, DFID's evaluations 87,000–311,000 EUR and DANIDA's 364,000–424,000 EUR⁵⁰.

The SDC report proposes that the terminology and procedures should be better harmonised and maybe even that a shared manual should be produced. The authors' most important recommendations concern much greater participation by the partner country and a higher degree of transparency with regard to the process and empirical material.

⁴⁹ On this point, it may seem that SDC's appraisal makes a similar mistake by not clarifying what this should be. It can be assumed that the authors mean numerically measurable indicators.

⁵⁰ No information on Sida's evaluations was given to the report's authors. A calculation within UTV in 2003 shows that each of the process evaluations (see Section 5.1) cost approx 1–1.5 MSEK, though this does not apply to exactly the same kinds of evaluations.

8 Summary discussion

This section tries to answer the three questions in the introduction, points to some problems that remain with country programme evaluations, discusses possible alternatives to country programme evaluations and looks at what the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness could mean for future country programme evaluations.

8.1 General conclusions

The review has shown that there is great interest among many development cooperation agencies in evaluating country strategies/country programmes and using these as a basis for planning future country programmes. Such evaluations are seen as possible and desirable, though what is included in a country programme evaluation varies considerably between organisations. There are, however, many bilateral donors such as the Netherlands and Norway that have stopped conducting country programme evaluations because they are too expensive and complicated in relation to their usefulness.

A *second* conclusion is that although the carrying out of country programme evaluations is seen as possible, in most cases the ambitions are now at a fairly low level. It is a question of drawing conclusions about 'likely contributions' to development and changes rather than determining definitive causal links. No organisation appears to have the ambition to evaluate country programmes as a logical whole – probably because nothing like that exists. Some organisations also have an interest in examining what could be called the 'internal effectiveness' of the organisation's country programme: is the programme as a whole relevant and consistent? Few organisations if any, however, appear to be interested in cost-effectiveness at country programme level (e.g. administration costs in relation to the size of the programme and its composition or possible 'duplicated work' within a sector).

A *third* conclusion is that for some organisations, e.g., DFID and UNDP, a measured level of ambition corresponds to a 'light approach' in the formulation of the evaluations. As far as possible the evaluations should be based on existing material, take little time and involve few consultants.

A *fourth* conclusion is that the cost and time spent can vary considerably depending on the method and composition of the contribution portfolio. However, UNDP, DFID and possibly also the European Commission, which are all major players in the partner countries, can carry out an evaluation within one year.

A *fifth* conclusion is that the methodology usually emphasises an indirect approach with a combination of sources, unlike methods that use more hard data with results that can be measured directly. Many organisations use assessments (rating, scoring), i.e., compilations with more or less subjective views by the organisation's programme officers or external evaluators as the basis of the evaluations. The validity of these assessments is tried against other information in so-called triangulation.

A *sixth* conclusion is that pure process evaluations seem to be quite rare. The results, which are mostly measured indirectly, are at the centre and the country strategy process may be studied as part of the more comprehensive evaluation.

8.2 Other issues

The review has also shown that there are a number of important problems or issues relating to country programmes and country programme evaluations that do not have an obvious answer or have not even been discussed.

One of these issues is the remarkable fact that there appears to be almost no discussion on *the partner countries' interest* in and use of country programme evaluations. The donor organisation's interests dominate the formulation and use. From the recipient countries' viewpoint, there ought to be at least three reasons for country programme evaluations:

- What does the cooperation offer the country compared with other forms of additional resources?
- What can we report with regard to results to *our* citizens?
- Which donors are most effective and which are most useful to us?

DANIDA's Uganda evaluation with joint leadership and formulation and Ugandan consultants in the evaluation team appears to be one possible route for greater involvement by the partner country in a country programme evaluation. There is a practical problem here however: if all donors consider the same solution, we are back to the problems of coordination and harmonisation that the Rome and Paris Declarations were supposed to solve. The important thing is probably not just participation in the actual evaluation but also effective forms for managing the results of the evaluations in the partner country.

Another issue is the problem of *fungibility*, i.e., what resources does cooperation provide to a country in practice (discussed earlier in Section 7.1). It is clear that country programme evaluations must raise this issue, and it is a problem that can only be handled at country level.

A third issue is *the quality of the empirical material*. It is all very well to try and keep the ambitions, costs and time spent low, but somewhere there is a reasonable limit for how 'light' the approach can be and still provide reliable

evaluations. A more rigorous method does not necessarily mean more hard data, though more extensive criticism of the sources and a clearer discussion of the basic data may be desirable in the preparation work.

A separate methodological problem is *what to compare with* – when is the result ‘good’ or ‘bad’? At the end of their report to the DAC conference in Vienna⁵¹, Conway and Maxwell discuss the possibilities of drawing conclusions on the effects of the country programme either by comparing with other donors’ results or through a theoretic contradictory situation, ‘the counter-factual’. According to Conway and Maxwell, comparisons with other donors are difficult in practice as the differences in focus and implementation are probably too great. Although they do not find any good examples of such comparisons in their material, they suggest that comparisons should be tried, at least at sector or project level. Since the report was written, the opportunities for such an approach may have increased. As the donors are becoming increasingly coordinated, the differences in focus ought reasonably to have decreased. On the other hand, maybe the coordination has gone so far that the possibilities of separating one donor’s contributions from another’s have disappeared altogether.

Conway and Maxwell say that a *counterfactual approach*, i.e., a hypothetical comparison between a situation ‘with’ and one ‘without’ donor support, can be tempting but is hardly acceptable from a methodological point of view. The influence from external, uncontrollable factors is normally too great to offer any definite conclusions. According to the authors, a before-after analysis may be successful at project level if there is a good *baseline* study or a comparable target group that has not been reached by the intervention⁵².

These different issues are left partly unanswered for the time being. They should be tackled in one way or another ahead of any future country programme evaluations.

8.3 Are there any alternatives to country programme evaluations?

With regard to what is currently happening within development cooperation there are at least three possible alternatives to individual country programme evaluations. Whether the alternatives are realistic in relation to what donors and recipients want to know is another matter. All three alternatives mean that the donors *refrain* from trying to trace the effects of the individual country programmes and look primarily at the total effects of the cooperation in a country.

⁵¹ Conway and Maxwell (1999)

⁵² The latter approach is now seen by some evaluators to be the only right way to measure long-term impacts, but such a quasi-experimental approach leads to serious practical and ethical problems with the cooperation.

The three alternatives are:

- following up Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS)
- so-called *Total ODA* studies
- joint evaluations at country programme level

8.3.1 Evaluations of Poverty Reduction Strategies

Approx 60 countries now (at the end of 2006) have a PRS – *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. The national Poverty Reduction Strategy should specify which means should be used to redistribute the resources and make the poorest in the country part of the economic development. The now accepted and expanded definition of the poverty concept is of course fundamental here.

Most development cooperation agencies have poverty reduction or poverty alleviation as a main objective of the support to a country, and in country strategies or equivalent documents this normally forms the most important goal. For Swedish cooperation, the partner country's PRS is a basic point of departure when formulating project plans and a cooperation strategy. In the past four to five years, the partner country's Poverty Reduction Strategies have become the most important individual documents of the development cooperation.

All PRSs contain a section on how they should be followed up, either in the form of household budget surveys and similar studies or with the help of special indicators collected by, for example, the country's central bureau of statistics. Sometimes a combination of the two ways is used.

There are two main problems with the PRS. One is that it is sometimes not fully supported by the partner country's own political process and, in reality, is primarily produced to satisfy the donors' requirements for the existence of a PRS. The other problem, which is naturally linked to the first, is that the donors' own country programmes may be based on unrealistic assumptions of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and its implementation.

Provided that these problems can be solved satisfactorily, ambitious independent follow-up of a country's PRS could, in practice, turn the PRS follow-up into a joint evaluation of the poverty goal with regard to the joint cooperation in a country and the forms of support for its implementation. Such an evaluation does of course say little about the effects of an individual donor's cooperation. Ownership of the Poverty Reduction Strategies, however, appears to be increasing among partner countries. If this development is reasonably clear, it adds weight to the argument of using PRSs for some form of 'collective' evaluations on what is normally the main goal of the OECD countries' cooperation, namely poverty reduction.

There are currently several reports on the implementation of the PRS instrument, but there is not yet an up-to-date summary of the results of the

efforts to drive the cooperation in a more consistent direction towards poverty reduction. The reason is that too little time has passed for significant effects to be traced.

In this context, it may be worth mentioning something about the so-called *Comprehensive Development Framework* (CDF)⁵³. The World Bank has compiled a summary of experiences of applying the CDF, and the report sees it mainly as a framework for implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) in a country, and the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 'is tantamount to implementing the CDF'. According to the report, which is based on a survey from 2005 and covers fifty-nine countries, there are advances with regard to all four components that make up the CDF compared with the corresponding survey two years earlier. The slowest thing seems to be the setting up of institutions for follow-up and evaluation.

8.3.2 Total ODA studies

An international investigation, with Sida as lead agency, of the possibility of evaluating the overall cooperation to a country is under way (at the time of writing)⁵⁴. The feasibility and meaningfulness of this is being appraised under the working name '*Total ODA*'⁵⁵. Typically the initiative came from the head of DAC's secretariat and not from a recipient country. A *Total ODA* study becomes more interesting and important if there is greater coordination between the donors, but it provides limited knowledge about the effects of the individual donor's contributions.

It is likely to take some time, however, before the methodology develops sufficiently for such a study to become possible. The problem that the study should highlight is as old as development cooperation, and maybe it is more an issue of research than something that results in an operatively useful evaluation. If a reliable method is worked out, *Total ODA* studies could answer a couple of the questions to which the recipient country ought to have answers, particularly the issue of the importance of resources added by cooperation compared with other sources.

Total ODA studies are not quite the same thing as a number of donors coming together to jointly evaluate their country programmes, as one objective is that the cooperation is seen as a whole, and it is primarily the recipient's perspective that should apply in such a study.

⁵³ CDF was launched in the mid-1990s, principally by the World Bank. In practice it was a way of summarising a number of principles for development cooperation activity that were included by an increasing number of donors. There are four principles: a long-term overall perspective, results orientation, the development goals being those of the country and not those of the donors, and that the development cooperation activity should be led by the partner country. See World Bank/OED (2003).

⁵⁴ DAC Evaluation Network (2006) *ODA Effectiveness at Country Level...*

DAC Evaluation Network (2004) *Assessing the Contribution of ODA to National Development Results.*

⁵⁵ ODA = Official Development Assistance

8.3.3 Joint evaluations at country level

An alternative to individual country programme evaluations could be joint evaluations with several countries coming together to evaluate their programmes to a country. So far, there is only one example of this, namely an evaluation of support by five countries to Afghanistan during the period 2001–05⁵⁶. A further joint evaluation at country level is planned for 2007 or 2008 in Bangladesh⁵⁷. Although such evaluations would in reality still be donor-led, they would probably be of more use to the receiving party than individual country programme evaluations, as they would cover a significant part of the cooperation and in most cases be carried out by the leading donor to a country.

The basis of such a joint evaluation ought to be that there are enough similarities between the donors' country programmes for the conclusions on the results and the learning to be generalised to some extent and maybe also applied to other donors' contributions in the country.

Conway and Maxwell rightly claim that there are strong, obvious reasons for joint evaluations: those where a number of donors come together and those where the donors and recipients carry out a joint evaluation. At the same time, there are a number of practical reasons why this does not happen. The practical obstacles mentioned include work generally being carried out within different time frames and the evaluation that should guide the focus for the next strategy period being a long way from the actual time of decision when the evaluation is to be used. Another reason is that different donors use different channels and implementation methods (on the other hand, this could also be used to advantage by offering opportunities for comparisons).

Maybe joint evaluations of this kind could be seen as a transitional form between individual country programme evaluations and a situation where the capacity of the partner country has reached such a level that it can carry out its own evaluations, e.g., thematic evaluations or sector evaluations.

8.4 Country programme evaluations and the Paris Declaration

It may seem paradoxical to even discuss individual bilateral country programme evaluations when the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness dominates thinking by the donors, with the stress on coordination and harmonisation of ways of working. The logical consequence ought naturally be joint country programme evaluations, e.g., in the forms mentioned earlier in the

⁵⁶ DANIDA (2005) *Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan 2001–05 – a joint evaluation*. The five countries are Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Sweden. Their total assistance to Afghanistan was just over 25 per cent of the total assistance to Afghanistan during the period.

For Afghanistan's government, the experiences from such a comprehensive evaluation ought reasonably to be of interest and use.

⁵⁷ The donors who intend to take part in the joint evaluation are the World Bank, ADB, Japan and DFID.

chapter or as follow-ups of the emerging joint country strategies in Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Uganda, and later on in other countries. In principle, this view may be right, but in practice there is quite a long way to go.

The first Joint Assistance Strategy (JAS) was created 2005–2006 for Tanzania. This is not a document that can be compared in scope and details with a ‘normal’ bilateral cooperation strategy but is rather a document that is more like letters of intent or a framework for cooperation and coordination between donors. Naturally, it will be followed up, but probably not in a way that makes it possible to say something about the effects of the contributions. And the donors that take part in the joint strategy – by no means all the donors to Tanzania – naturally have their own internal planning methods and contribution portfolios that need to be followed up. A joint strategy in its final form also assumes joint financing, mainly in the form of non-earmarked budget support, and we do not have that situation either.

The joint assistance strategies for Zambia, finalised in 2007, is more developed and has a fairly elaborate mechanism for follow-up. The Swedish so-called Covering Note, which is decided upon by the Swedish government and is effectively the Swedish strategy, includes in an annex a monitoring framework based on the JASZ⁵⁸ and Zambia’s development plan. If a report generated from these monitoring indicators can be considered an evaluation will be an interesting issue.

It seems likely that Sweden and Sida will continue to work with cooperation strategies over the next five to ten years, and they will undoubtedly need mechanisms for follow-up and to account for the results of the operation to Swedish recipients and partner countries’ governments and citizens. The current forms have shortcomings, which have been discussed in Section 5.2 among others. Are these shortcomings big enough to justify Sweden carrying out some form of country programme evaluations in the future? Could country programme evaluations provide much better information to Sweden and the partner country and fit better into the results-based management of the cooperation that is also part of the Paris Declaration? The route that DFID, for example, now applies may also be useful to Sweden. The following chapter proposes a form for a new follow-up mechanism for Swedish cooperation at county level.

⁵⁸ JASZ = Joint Assistance Strategy for Zambia 2007–2010.

9 Proposal for managing and shaping Swedish country programme evaluations

The proposal below should be seen as a *basic model* that can be developed or adapted to the situation in different partner countries. The proposal contains the essentials of a partly new way for Sida to work with results at country level.

9.1 The proposal

- 1) The current outcome assessments in the country strategy process should be replaced by country programme evaluations.
- 2) The country programme evaluations should be based on the project and programme evaluations that have been carried out during the strategy period and be supplemented by limited special studies, e.g., interviews with stakeholders and evaluations within important sectors that have not been evaluated.
- 3) The responsibility for country programme evaluations should rest with Sida's Department for Evaluation (UTV) *and* with suitable partners in the partner country.
- 4) All project and programme evaluations of Sida's contributions or those to which Sweden contributes should be planned with regard to also serving as a basis for the country programme evaluation.
- 5) Project and programme evaluations should be planned with essential support from UTV in order to ensure their usefulness for the next country programme evaluation.

9.2 Pros and cons of the proposal

There are several benefits with the proposal:

- accounting for the results of the operation and the results analysis become more standardised and the quality more even,
- a big work-load is taken off embassies and regional departments, which can spend more time on conclusions and measures raised by the country programme evaluations,

- the evaluation becomes more independent, as the main responsibility falls on a non-operational part of Sida,
- project and programme evaluations will probably become more even in quality and have clearer links to the applicable strategy,
- the proposal makes orientation easier towards work aimed at results,
- project and programme evaluations are used 'twice': for the primary aim of the project and as part of the basis for the country programme evaluation,
- the support from UTV increases, which has a training effect and also takes the load off the programme officers.

Several problems will arise if the proposal is implemented. These are mainly linked to interventions within a country programme being carried out mostly in cooperation with other donors. Normally, any evaluations are then also coordinated, which means that *the time* of an evaluation cannot just be decided by Sweden. Neither can the *formulation* of the evaluations become just a Swedish matter. These are practical problems that can probably be solved differently within a strategy period. The important thing is not to achieve some sort of completely Swedish uniformity but to safeguard the quality of the project evaluation, and to plan so that the time of the project evaluations that are carried out are fairly reasonable in relation to future country programme evaluations. As some form of evaluation or *mid-term review* is carried out for most projects and programmes, it would be beneficial if they were not completely individually formulated from the start but met certain joint quality requirements and could thereby be used more easily to provide an overall picture of the cooperation during the strategy period.

A more united system for contribution evaluations within a country programme and higher quality accounting for the results of the operation would probably also be beneficial to the other donors and the partner country. A plan for the Swedish evaluations in a partner country would give a better overview for all parties, and a Swedish country programme evaluation would make it easier for the partner country to evaluate Swedish cooperation and any comparative advantages.

If the country programme evaluation is consistently formulated and carried out together with the partner country, it will contribute to improving evaluation knowledge and to the possibilities of reporting on the results of the cooperation to the citizens in the partner country.

There are not only practical but also fundamental problems with this proposal, however, and it is naturally linked to the thoughts in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The objection is as follows: why should Sweden start its own more ambitious follow-up activity when the goal should be greater coordination between donors and adaptation to the partner country's way of working? In many countries in Africa, work is also under-

way by donors on joint country strategies, and it then becomes natural to evaluate the outcome jointly.

There are at least three answers to this. The first is that there are still only a few joint country strategies, and in most countries to which Sweden provides cooperation it will take a while before the coordination has gone far enough to talk about joint country programmes. Sweden thus still needs some form of results follow-up of its contributions and its country programme. The second answer is that it is probably not easier but more difficult to evaluate coordinated contributions. When joint country programmes are to be followed up and evaluated it would be an advantage if experienced evaluators were part of the planning. The basic model of the proposal can quite easily be adapted to situations in countries where cooperation between donors has come a very long way. The third answer is that whether the donors have fewer or more individual country programmes, decisions still have to be taken on the countries' own contribution. Some form of feedback is required as a decision basis for continued support or information on what has happened to contributions that have been carried out, and better basic data is likely to lead to better decisions.

9.3 Consequences for UTV

Sida's Department for Evaluation (UTV) currently plays a very small role in the project and programme evaluations of interventions supported by Sida. The involvement is limited to UTV putting together a list of evaluations that departments at Sida in Stockholm and the embassies plan for the coming year and to publishing the evaluations that have been carried out in Sida's series *Sida Evaluations*. In some cases, UTV may have contributed views and advice on the formulation of an individual evaluation, but this advice is only at the request of the programme administrator and applies only to a few evaluations a year. UTV does not routinely appraise the contents of the embassies' and departments' evaluations before they are published. The only check that is made is that the manuscript agrees with the current publication guidelines, e.g., that there is a summary and terms of reference⁵⁹.

It is neither realistic nor desirable for UTV to take responsibility for all Sida's project and programme evaluations. However, UTV could be included more systematically in the planning of both the evaluation and the follow-up programme for the current country strategy period and in the formulation of individual evaluations. From the 2006 financial year, UTV has increased its advisory services to departments and embassies, and the proposal on country programme evaluations fits well with this.

⁵⁹ In 2006, UTV commissioned a quality appraisal of approx 30 project and programme evaluations that had been carried out by departments and embassies. The appraisal was carried out for three reasons: to gain an understanding of the level of quality, to develop a method for possible future systematic quality appraisals and to improve knowledge within UTV about project evaluations in connection with the increased and more active advisory services that UTV has launched. The results show that the evaluations are of very uneven quality. The report will be published in 2007.

9.4 Continued work

The proposal must be further developed and adapted to different situations. This is best done in consultation with Sida's regional departments, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and embassies and sections in the field.

The first step should be to obtain more information on experiences of carrying out and using country programme evaluations from organisations currently working on such programmes, primarily DFID, UNDP and the European Commission. These three organisations have evaluation departments that are not much bigger than Sida's UTV. These organisations' country evaluations are carried out with relatively standardised terms of reference, and consultants are procured through framework agreements, which means that the workload of an individual evaluation is not as great.

Naturally, the consequences of the proposal for the workload at UTV, the embassies and different sections at Sida's head offices, and the role division between UTV and the operational departments must be carefully analysed. It ought to be possible to carry out a *consequence analysis* in spring 2007.

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An Overview of Experiences and a Proposal for
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Stefan Dahlgren
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Evaluations of Country Strategies

The study summarises experiences from country strategy or country programme evaluations in various organisations. It looks at the possibility of applying such experiences on Swedish development cooperation in the light of recent changes in aid ideology and practice and discusses what alternatives development partners may have for overall assessment of aid effectiveness.

The main conclusion is that many organisations obviously find it worthwhile to carry out country programme evaluations but that ambitions about causes and effects are kept at a modest level. An important question raised in the study is why the recipient countries so far show little interest in such evaluations which could help them to make strategic decisions about development assistance and about comparative advantages for different forms for transfer of resources.



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