



2013:46

Sida Decentralised Evaluation

Måns Felleesson
Mats Hårsmar

Review of Sida's Programme for Development Research

Final Report

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Måns Fellessen
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Authors: Måns Fellesson and Mats Hårsmar

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Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2013:46

Commissioned by Sida, Department for Global Cooperation, Unit for Research Cooperation

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Date of final report: January 2013

Published by Citat 2013

Art. no. Sida61674en

urn:nbn:se:sida-61674en

This publication can be downloaded from: <http://www.sida.se/publications>

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

U-forsk	Sida's programme for development support
Sida	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
SAREC	Sida's Department for Research Co-operation
VR	Swedish Research Council
SSEESS	The Swedish Secretariat for Environmental Earth System Science
KI	Karolinska Institutet
SLU	Swedish Agricultural University
KTH	Royal Institute of Technology

Preface

This report is a review of Sida's support to Swedish research of relevance to development and poverty reduction – the programme for development research (U-forsk). The questions at issue for the review stem from a need to understand the significance and role of the programme in relation to contextual and organizational changes that have taken place during the period 2006 to 2012. To provide a basis for the further handling of the programme the reviewers have covered a broad spectrum of areas from overall and intricate questions on significance, quality, relevance and synergies to more specific and practical issues relating to the administration of the programme. By 2013 the programme will enter a new phase in its existence by the transfer from Sida to the Swedish Research Council. Hopefully, the results from this review will constitute a valuable contribution to the future development and handling of the programme.

Mats Hårsmar and Måns Fellesson have conducted the review. They are both researchers at the Nordic Africa Institute with prior experience from working with research and policy related issues at Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Executive Summary

Sida's programme for development research (U-forsk) has provided financial support to Swedish research of relevance to development. It was last evaluated in 2006, in the context of a total evaluation of Swedish support to development research. This overview covers the period 2006-2012 – a period during which Sida has gone through substantive organisational changes. The reorganisations have been accompanied by several amendments in the U-forsk programme such as changing financing modalities; changes in overall directives of the programme; as well as a sharp reduction in administrative resources allocated to the programme.

Changes in the programme have occurred in a context of continuously evolving international relations, which among other things have brought shifts in the way “development” is conceived of. It has become increasingly difficult to place countries within traditional categories, such as “developing” or “least developed”. Challenges, which during long time have been considered as national (such as poverty reduction) increasingly turn trans-border in character. Other challenges of regional and global characters are rapidly added. As a consequence, “development research” or research of relevance to “development”, are becoming increasingly vague concepts.

Such long-term global changes, combined with rapid and at times dramatic changes in the management of the programme have led to a sharp decline in applications for the U-forsk programme. This decline has continued throughout the period, with a possible slight recovery over the last two years. Decline has occurred in all disciplinary areas, and concerns both senior and younger researchers. As a consequence, members of reference groups have become fewer, and of lower academic standing. It is possible, but beyond the scope of this overview to firmly establish, that these trends reflect a shrinking resource base for development relevant research in Sweden.

This overview has assessed the quality of research financed by the U-forsk programme to be comparable with research funded by other Swedish research councils. It has found relevance to be a complex concept, which has been dealt with differently over the studied period. Earlier practices of collegial dialogue and scrutiny by Sida's research advisors of proposed project's relevance have not been replaced by for instance, written relevance criteria or other mechanisms. The screening has instead been handed over to members of reference groups without further directions. Especially, the outsourcing of the assessment of research in “global health” during 2011 and 2012 to the Swedish Research Council (VR) has raised serious concerns about the way the relevance criterion has been managed.

Synergies between the U-forsk programme on the one hand and bilateral research programmes or regional or global research programmes on the other, have always

been weak. During the period, Sida has in practice abandoned tools and mechanisms it had at hand to establish such synergies. In the future, such synergies will increasingly depend on initiative and entrepreneurship on the part of researchers. To rectify, functional channels for information sharing and communication between VR and Sida have to be developed.

There are no functional mechanisms for establishing links between research and policy/practice in Swedish development cooperation. Sida staff is less able than ever to set aside time for this. The special modalities meant to have such effects (network support, invitation areas) have not led to such results. Attempts to achieve such linkages should continue, albeit outside the U-forsk programme.

Despite all these shortcomings, the need for a programme such as U-forsk is assessed to be possibly greater than ever. Increasing global challenges, emerging roles of low-income countries, changing international relations all call for this kind of research.

When the programme in 2013 according to a government decision will be moved to the Swedish Research Council (VR), it is mandatory that VR develops mechanisms for dealing with development relevance. This will have to be done in close cooperation with Sida. The programme should also be redefined in such a way that it starts to crowd in more research of relevance for development (understood in a broad way), rather than to monopolise the field. There is great need for complementary funding from other research councils. Opportunities for this may open up. With the move to VR this field of research now stands a real chance to overcome prejudices about being of second class quality.

There are also reasons to increase the financing envelope of the U-forsk programme itself, not least since it has to open up for financing joint applications from researchers in Sweden and in low-income countries. This way, the programme will help to further the internationalisation of Swedish research beyond the OECD and some middle-income countries.

1 Methodology and Starting Points

The methodological approach of this review has been guided by the terms of reference for the assignment (appendix). The review builds on primary and secondary data sources. Three main data collecting methods have been used: i) review of documentation, ii) review of statistics and iii) interviews.

Review of documentation: A substantial amount of relevant documentation has been reviewed. Main types of documents have been government policy statements (appropriation letters and instructions, policies, strategies, bills and annual reports), annual reports for Sida and the research collaboration, guidelines for application, decisions and protocols from the research board, result reports from researchers (projects, networks and planning grants), and documentation from other research councils (primarily the Swedish research council). Previously conducted evaluations have also been an important source and reference.

Review of statistics: Accessible statistics covering the period 2006 – 2012 operation of the programme has been reviewed and processed. Main statistical sources have been annual compilations of applicants and granted applications.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews have been an important source of information for this review. A substantial number of interviews have been conducted with key persons, identified on the basis of their role and function in relation to the programme. Categories of key persons have been staff members at Sida and the Swedish research council (VR), members of reference groups at Sida and VR, members of Sidas research board and researchers (applicants and recipients of grants). Selection has been based on scientific disciplines, institutional affiliation, position, gender and age. The interviews, conducted face to face, by phone or over e-mail, have been based on specially designed interview guides (see appendix). On some occasions group interviews have been applied.

Limitations: Assessing questions of quality and relevance in a programme like U-forsk is a challenging task. There are many different approaches and methods that could be used, some more difficult and time consuming than others. The review has not applied the method of bibliometric citation analysis in assessing the quality of the research. Instead the assessments have primarily been done on the basis of interviews

with key informants where questions on quality and relevance have been a central question area. Another limitation in the process of assessment has been difficulties to obtain statistics in certain areas. Statistics in some areas have been lacking or have not been reported in a uniform way allowing for comparative analysis.¹

Baseline: The evaluations published in 2006 provide an important reference (Sida evaluation 06/24 and 06/27). The results and recommendations of these evaluations have partly been used for the set-up of the review, but more importantly they have served a comparative function. The following main results from the two evaluations have been identified:

- The operative goals of programme were seen as not efficient and not measurable in qualitative or quantitative terms.
- The goals had not been adequately followed up.
- The goals were considered to be out of date and did not relate to the Policy for Global Development (PGD).
- The volume of the programme was judged to be sufficient in one evaluation and insufficient in the other evaluation.
- Cooperation with other research councils was insufficient.
- The management of the programme was adequate and in line with praxis in the Swedish research funding system.
- The effect of the programme on the research produced at Swedish higher learning institutions was judged to be insignificant.

¹ This problem has been recognized also in previous evaluations of the programme (Sida evaluations 06/27 and 06/24).

2 Situating the Program

Sida's programme for development research (U-forsk) started in the late 1970s as one of the activities that the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) undertook. The programme turned into an integrated part of Sida's portfolio when SAREC was integrated into Sida in 1994, and has remained so ever since.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY AND STRATEGY FRAMEWORK OF THE PROGRAM

At an overall level, a review of U-forsk needs to be contextually sited in the policy framework governing the support to research in the Swedish development cooperation as a whole.

Prior to 2010, when the government implemented a specific policy and strategy for research in the development cooperation, the policy guidance of the support to research was done through the appropriation letters and the instruction to Sida. Screening the appropriation letters between 2006 and 2009 the direction of the research support is relatively consistently pointing at capacity building in developing countries, thematic research of relevance for developing countries and Swedish research on development issues². With regard to the latter the specific wording on the objective reads "to promote scientific cooperation between researchers in Sweden and in the developing countries and the participation of Swedish researchers in developing relevant research and research collaboration".

This wording implies that cooperation between Swedish researchers and researchers in developing countries must be considered as a main component in the U-forsk programme. The appropriation letters point out the three overall directions of support to

² The appropriation letters for 2006 and 2007 contain specific instructions on the activities in scope of the research support while the appropriation letter covering 2008 and 2008 refers to a government decision on interim governance of the support to research, while awaiting the policy and strategy (UD2007/43979/USTYR). However, the content in the interim decision is the same as in the appropriation letters of 2006 and 2007.

research and the budget allocation to the specific budget post for research. Apart from this, the letters provide no further policy guidance on the operation of the support. In the instruction to Sida the sole policy guidance concerns the establishment of an advisory body for research collaboration. This body will provide advice on matters concerning support to international science program, support for building research capacity in partner countries, support for research in Sweden on developing countries and advice on the composition and mandate for the scientific reference groups. These specifications are intimately linked to the areas of activity in the appropriation letters and could consequently be read as indirect instruction on the direction of the support to research.

Since 2010, Sida's support to research co-operation is governed by a government policy and strategy³. The policy, which should be seen as the normative guiding document, states that the overall objective of the support to research is "to strengthen and develop research of relevance to the fight against poverty in development countries" Fulfilling this objective the support to research should focus on three areas of priority: 1) research capacity building in developing countries and regions, 2) research of relevance to developing countries and 3) Swedish research of relevance to developing countries. The program for development support (U-forsk) responds to the third priority area. The policy also underlines the importance of linkages and synergies between the areas of priority in decisions on support.

Central for the understanding of the programme is also the guiding principles for the research support formulated in the policy. Of particular importance is the principle highlighting quality as the primary factor in the evaluation of research proposals. Worth noting is the writing on the relation between scientific quality and development relevance where the latter should be of subordinate importance. To ensure quality, relevance and objectivity of the research, the policy also emphasizes the need to involve international scientific expertise in the evaluation processes. Another important point for the review is the policy principle on "research on equal footing". This refers to an understanding of the relationship between Swedish researchers and researchers from low-income countries as being basically unequal in terms of ability to influence, implement and report research. To counterbalance this unequal relationship the policy states that the support to research should be organized in such a way that it "helps prevent the development of a superior and an inferior status in this relationship".

³ Policy for research in the Swedish Development Cooperation 2010 – 2014 and strategy for Sida's support for research cooperation 2010 – 2014.

Turning to the specific formulation of the rationale for the third priority area; Swedish research of relevance to developing countries, it highlights the need for a Swedish research competence (resource base) in the field of global development to ensure participation in “joint endeavours of various kinds – bilaterally, regionally and internationally”. There is a clear intention to create linkages with the other prioritized areas in the support to research. The importance of research partnership is also stressed as a basic prerequisite for the production of internationally competitive Swedish research in the field. The main argument here is that partnerships (international and with low-income country researchers) is required to prevent quality and relevance deficiencies resulting from national scientific isolation. In addition to this, the need for a national scientific expertise in the field is also motivated by competence needs from Swedish actors in field such as Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Moving on to the strategy for Sida’s support for research cooperation, this is to large extent an extension and operationalization of the normative guidance of the policy⁴. With reference to the third area of priority, the strategy states the specific objective of increasing the production of research in Sweden through calls for funding. Main result reporting parameters attached to this objective are assessment of quality, size and focus of the Swedish resource base, account of steps taken to increase partnership between Swedish researchers and researchers in developing countries and assessments of links between Swedish researchers and various implementing actors in the development cooperation. The strategy also further develops principles expressed by the policy concerning the need for supplementary international assessment of research proposals and the need for increased cooperation between Swedish researchers and researchers in developing countries. Sida is here instructed to develop a sustainable system for international peer review and to assess the potential for joint application and funding allocation.

Viewing the policy development in the area of support to research from 2006 to 2012 with an explicit reference to the U-forsk program the following conclusions can be made:

- At an overall level the policy guidance, pointing out the direction and areas activities for the research support, has remained relatively consistent over time.

⁴ In general, the concept of strategies is the government’s most important tool for governing activities in the development cooperation. Strategies are as rule tied to fixed annual budget allocations containing specifications on the activities to be carried out in a particular strategy area as well as areas for result reporting.

- A slight policy modification on the importance of co-operation can be observed in the area of activity relating to Swedish research on development issues. Prior to the 2010 policy and strategy, cooperation is highlighted as a main condition for the research activity. In the 2010 policy and strategy this is still an important component, but seems to be subordinate to the objective of increasing the production of research at Swedish institutions. There also seem to be some discrepancy between the policy and strategy with regard to the importance of cooperation in this area of activity.
- With the implementation of the policy and strategy in 2010 the degree of governance of the program has increased. This does not mainly concern the principal direction of the programme, but rather the conditions for its operation through guiding principles on scientific quality, organization of peer-reviews, cooperation and equal relations within these.
- The importance of synergies between the three main areas of activities has been further underlined by the implementation of the 2012 policy and strategy.

2.2 DIRECTIONS AND CHANGES OVER TIME

While the analysis of the policy framework provides important information on the overall direction of the area of activity relating to the U-forsk program and changes taking place over time, the next step is to look at how these policy instructions have been operationalized at Sida. This has essentially been done through the mediation of directives in the guiding instructions. In this regard “Information to applicants” provides the most important source of information. A relatively uniform picture emerges regarding the basic scientific direction. Research supporting the overall goal of the Swedish development cooperation has remained a central criterion, as well as the reference to the overall goal of the Policy for Global Development (PGD).

However, looking at how the specific thematic guidance has evolved over time we can note a tendency towards more detailed instructions up to 2011. From 2006 and ahead the basic scientific instruction of the program has to varying extent been supplemented with specific invitation areas (2006-2009), focus on global challenges defined in the government’s result reporting on the PGD (2010), the government’s strategic priorities for the development aid (2010), focusing of countries (2010) and a special thematic call on infectious diseases (2010). The 2011 guidance to applicants, being the most detailed in terms of thematic instruction, takes government’s three strategic priorities for the development aid as starting point for the identification of a number of quite specific research areas. While the 2011 guiding instructions may represent somewhat of a peak in thematic instructions for the program, the following years 2012 and 2013 contained no thematic specifications at all. The demand for re-

search of relevance to the Swedish development cooperation was further emphasized, but without specifying any criterion or references to policy.

To conclude, from 2006 and up to 2011 Sida has to varying extent used policy guidance to achieve a thematic demarcation of the program. However, the incentive for this is not clear. There have been no government instructions advising Sida to apply thematic demarcations. On the contrary, at least in the 2010 policy, the objective is formulated in a quite open manner with emphasis on quality as the prime factor for support. So, on what basis have these thematic boundaries been taken and more importantly to what extent have they influenced the direction of the support?

2.3 VOLUME 2006-2012

The following table provide information about the financial size of the U-forsk programme.

Table 1: Funding within the programme (Thousand SEK)

Budget posts/year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Budget U-forsk	121 000	127 000	115 000	121 000	84 610	92 000	118 000
Invitation areas (From other budget posts at Sida)	6 830	11 000	8 570	3 570	1 150	0	0
Networks	6 850	3 900	5 700	9 600	4 270	4 450	0
Total (U-forsk, invitation areas and networks)	134 680	141 900	129 270	134 170	90 030	96 450	118 000

3 Management of the Programme

This section will deal with how the U-forsk programme has been administered and managed over the assessed period, by Sida and by the reference groups particularly assigned for the programme.

3.1 ASSESSMENT OF THE GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

The 2006 evaluation of Sida's support to research pointed to the need of better clarifying the objectives of the support to Swedish research of relevance for development. The operative goals had not been clearly operationalized, and appropriations and spending were not judged to be related to the sub-goals of the programme, according to the evaluation. The evaluators focused on the lack of measurability, and criticised the objectives for not being properly situated in the Swedish development cooperation context.

Despite attempts at rectifying such weaknesses, lack of clarity in the objectives has remained a problem throughout the period 2006-2012. It is mainly how the overall objective of the programme should relate to the objectives for Swedish development cooperation, and how the latter objectives should be framed, that remains unclear. It has throughout the period been stated that research to be funded shall be relevant to Swedish development cooperation (as distinct from for instance to "development" as such, or to low income countries or any other country category). However, the basis of the problem is vagueness and multiplicity in the overall objectives for Swedish development cooperation; Should the programme relate to the objectives of the PGD; to the overall objective for Swedish development cooperation ("contribute to create preconditions for poor people to improve their living conditions"), or to the three thematic priorities that the Swedish government has made for the current election period? In fact, in the information annually provided to applicants, the programme has referred to all of these – interchangeably and with the internal order of importance shifting between the years.

In the calls for applications concerning the funding years 2007, 2008 and 2009, reference was made to the overall objective for Swedish development cooperation, placed in the framework of the main principles for the PGD (democracy and good governance, respect for human rights, gender equality, sustainable use of natural resources/ environmental care, economic growth, social development and safety, conflict management and security, global public goods). When development cooperation is placed in this wider framework it allows for a wide interpretation of the relevance concept. The PGD pillars opens up for most aspects of development processes. The practice of

placing Swedish development cooperation within the wider PGD framework was continued throughout the period. However, when the government in 2009 decided to focus the PGD on six more specific global challenges, delineated by three subthemes each, the interpretation of relevance for the U-forsk programme became narrower, all of a sudden.

In the call for applications for 2010, it was stated that research should focus either on the PGD, either on the three thematic priorities that the Swedish government had made for the current mandate period or a specific theme (communicable diseases). Hence, the narrowing down that was a consequence of the PGD reformulation was somewhat compensated for by adding these other thematic areas. Still, the end result was a narrower focus for the programme. Arriving to the call for applications for 2011, the focus got even narrower in that only research falling within the governments' three thematic priorities would get funded, with an additional window (5 MSEK) for research on the impact of research and innovation in developing countries.

In the call for 2012, the scope got wider again. This time it was – in a very brief formulation – stated that research should be “relevant for the alleviation of poverty in developing countries and contribute to a fair and sustainable development” (Information to Applicants, 2012:4). The same formulation has been retained for the 2013 call.

According to persons responsible for shaping the programme, the narrowing down of the areas of eligibility came in response to sudden and unforeseen decreases in government funding for the programme. A stricter delimitation of the programme would result in fewer applications, and hence less frustration on the part of researchers. To judge from comments from researchers it is probable that this contributed to make researchers abstain from applying, although other factors might have been even more influential in this respect.

During the period, the information given to applicants has been made briefer in its format. Some 40 pages (2008) have turned 20 (2012/2013), and information less detailed. The main reason for this is a shift to an electronic application system, which contains instructions and automatically creates the correct format. The instructions are assessed to have been clear and easy to understand throughout the period. However, several researchers express criticism regarding the request for descriptions of how applications relate to gender perspectives and the Swedish policy for global development (PGD). It is not perceived as clear at what level of detail information should be provided on these aspects.

3.2 TIME ALLOCATION OF STAFF RESOURCES

The 2006 evaluation of Swedish research support to developing countries and development relevant research contained a specific study of the U-forsk programme (Deiaco et al, 2006). Conclusions and recommendations have been summarised above (p 4). One particular recommendation was for support to be given to somewhat fewer, but bigger and more long-term projects that were thematically more in line with the objectives of Swedish development cooperation.

Sida acted on this recommendation already in 2007 by discontinuing the support to individual PhD students. The intention was for such support to be included in larger projects. An earlier limitation of PhD financing of maximum 50 per cent within the programme was lifted. Another reason behind this shift was that Sida also wanted to increase its support to young researchers (new PhD:s) through increasing the numbers of post-doc projects. Those PhD:s that already were admitted support, and were in the midst of their education, had the same possibility as before to receive funding throughout the four year PhD period. Hence the window for continued PhD support was kept for two more years.

Support to guest researchers was also discontinued in 2007. The applications for this support were few, and seldom in line with the intended purpose.

As a build-up to the move towards larger and more long-term support, the call for 2008 allowed for one-year support only. The plan was to go for 5-year programmes with up to 5 MSEK in annual support. An additional reason for this change towards fewer and larger programmes was the internal reorganisation taking place within Sida in 2008. The prior research department, SAREC, was transformed into a research secretariat, with a different position in the organisation. The reorganisation had also resulted in fewer research advisors, and a shift towards fewer applications would render less administration, it was assumed.

However, things did not turn out as expected. When the Swedish government budget bill for 2010 was tabled in the Parliament in October 2009 a severe cutback in funding to development research was a fact. As a consequence of this Sida had to reconsider its allocations. Only three-year projects were admitted, and the amounts were on average around 800 000 SEK annually, with the largest project receiving 2 MSEK/year. What was meant to provide institutional support turned in the end out to be ordinary project support.

Sida's plans became known to the academic community, partly through the members of Sida's research council. The cutback in funding met strong reactions. Letters were written to the minister for development cooperation, and a meeting was held between representatives of Sida's research council and the State Secretary for development cooperation. In order to somewhat mitigate the strong reactions, Sida decided to delimit the objective of the programme, as described above.

The delimitations made in the programme focus rendered the existing disciplinary reference groups obsolete. However, this also called for more staff resources at Sida. In January 2011, a new re-organisation of Sida was made. The research secretariat was split up. Some research advisors mainly charged with bilateral research support were transferred to the department for long-term collaboration. Some of these were subsequently transferred to country teams based in partner countries. Remaining research advisors, mainly in charge of global research support and the U-forsk programme, were placed in a research unit, within the department for global partnerships. This reorganisation was motivated by efforts to integrate global, regional and bilateral research support with general development cooperation programmes at respective levels. The negative side was that linkages between the various different research components were broken, or at least difficult to uphold, given that research advisors were relocated in the organisation instead of working as a coherent team. The positive side was enhanced synergies between, and the integration of, research support and wider development cooperation programmes.

Overall, the reorganisations of Sida in 2008 and 2011 resulted in a decreased number of research advisors (from 36 down to 19, plus 7 program officers in the field of research), increasing difficulties to undertake team work as well as to share responsibilities between research advisors. In 2006, all research advisors were on some part of their time involved in the administration and management of the U-forsk programme. The reading and assessment of applications provided them with opportunities to be updated in their particular research field. In addition, they were well placed to assess relevance, since they both had an overview of their respective research field, and through continuous collegial dialogue over the years had developed a joint understanding of how relevance was to be interpreted. Since the second reorganisation was completed in 2011, the programme is administered by one single research advisor, one assistant and part time efforts from the five research advisors with thematic responsibilities. Reading of applications is generally not done by Sida staff any longer, and the collegial dialogue regarding relevance is not taking place any longer. Hence, the scope for their assessment of relevance has seriously shrunk.

The changes in programme objectives introduced during 2009 proved to be labour intensive, since old reference groups and with them working routines became less relevant. This led to a reversal of the programme in 2011, when the earlier, wider, objective was reintroduced, and more responsibilities were placed on the reference groups. For instance, the reference groups were now charged with assessing not only scientific quality, but also the relevance for Swedish development cooperation.

Another response to shrinking administrative capacity was to outsource responsibilities for various parts of the programme. The Swedish Research Council was in 2011 charged with reviewing and assessing applications within the field of health research. 10 MSEK was transferred from Sida to the Research Council for support to projects within this field, and reviews were done by the Research Councils' own scientific reference groups. In the fields of natural sciences and environment (NM) and natural sciences and technology (NT) the Swedish Secretariat for Environmental Earth Sys-

tem Sciences (SSEESS), hosted by the Royal Academy of Sciences was in 2011 and 2012 charged with the administration of all applications within this field. This included the formation of reference groups and management of the review process. The allocation decisions were still taken by Sida on the basis of the ranked lists of applications that were delivered by the SSEESS.

3.3 THE WORK OF THE REFERENCE GROUPS

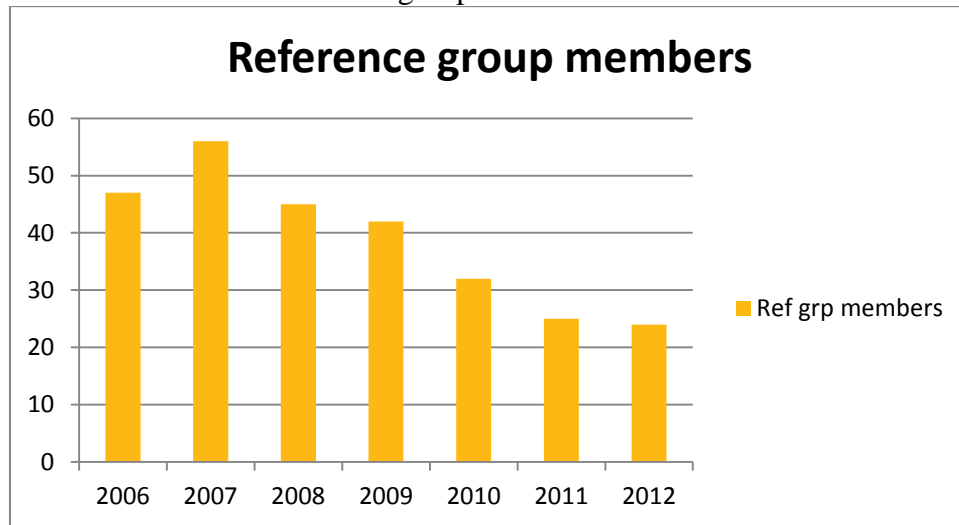
The reference groups have the core function of assessing and ranking the applications in the U-forsk programme. Even though they have no formal mandate to take decision proposed ranking lists are rarely questioned by the research council, which also has only an advisory mandate.⁵

To get an overview of how the reference groups have worked over time the review has looked into the following areas: 1) composition, role and function, 2) the assessment and scoring system, 3) handling of conflict of interests (jäv) and 4) the role and use of peer-review.

In parallel to the sharp drop in applications – something we will return to later – there has been a sharp reduction in reference group members. Over the seven years, the number of reference group members has been reduced by more than half. Exceptions are the reference groups for natural science and technique and for natural science and environment, where reductions have been kept at 25 percent.

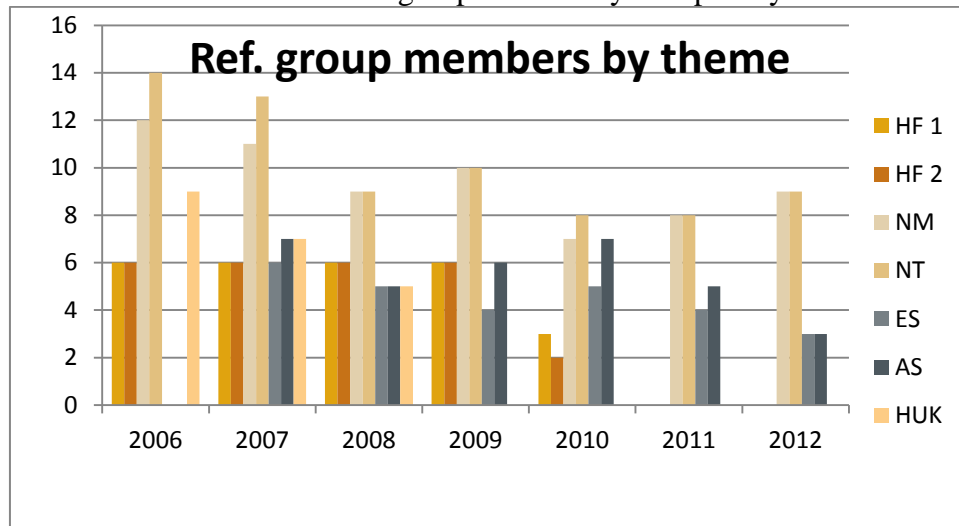
⁵ The mandate of the research council was changed in 2008 (SFS:2007:1371). Its principal function remained (guiding and assess proposals for research in Sida's support to research) but the mandate to taking decisions was removed. From 2008 the research council is advisory body to the board at Sida. In relation to the U-forsk programme the council is not involved in the assessment of individual applications but gives its approval to the compilation of proposed projects for funding made by the reference groups.

Table 2: Number of reference group members



The academic weight of the reference groups has also fallen. This is indicated by the share of full professors in the reference groups, which has fallen from two thirds to less than one third. The drop in academic status was especially pronounced between the years 2009-2010, and between the years 2011-2012. The first of these drops occurred simultaneously with the sharp decrease in funding allocated by the government.

Table 3: Number of reference group member by disciplinary area



Another change in the composition of reference groups, which was observed during the period, is that the gender composition has become more unbalanced. In 2008 40 per cent of reference group members were women, whereas this share had shrunk to a mere 17 per cent in 2012.

The parallel decreases in applications and reference group members have left the workload on each reference group member fairly unchanged in terms of applications to scrutinize. The average number of applications per reference group member has oscillated between 7 and 9, with the lowest share in 2010. However, during 2011 and

2012 an increasing administrative burden has been placed on reference group members, who have been asked to assess development relevance and write a summary of the assessment for each application. These were tasks formerly done by Sida staff. Reportedly, the increase in duties was to some extent compensated by introduction of a well-functioning web-based application system. The following narratives from members of the reference groups give some illustration of this:

“The administrative support from Sida has really weakened in recent years and nowadays we are expected to preform much more than just assessing applications, administrative matters that use to be Sida’s responsibility” (Member of reference group, AS)

“Sida seems to have disappeared from the table, but I am aware of the resource situation so I am not surprised. A few years back it was much more of a joint process between Sida staff and us. There was back-up and guidance from Sida staff and not least an institutional memory, which was a very important for the assessment process. Now this is almost gone.” (Member of reference group, HF)

The instruments for the assessment of applications have remained the same since 2006. Most of the interviewed members of reference groups reported that they saw no major problems with the existing scoring system. However, some pointed at the need to differentiate the scores between reference group members. It was suggested that the first and second reader be given extra weight in the final assessment, to increase quality.

The handling of conflict of interest (jäv) in the assessment process was in general not seen as a problem among the members of the reference groups. A certain variation in the respondents’ descriptions of the criteria used in the groups was however noted, which displays an absence of formal guidance in this regard. The most frequent criteria used were colleague, employed by same department, collaboration partners and joint publication five years back in time. Even though conflict of interest was not considered a major problem, many respondents stressed the need for instructions from Sida for consistency reasons in its appliance. References were also made to the rules of the Swedish research council, where for example members of reference groups are not allowed to be part of the assessment process the years they have applied. Another frequent suggestion was to involve more non-Swedish researchers, preferably from Scandinavia.

“Jäv has never been a contested issue in my reference group. If a person reports jäv, he or she just leaves the room. But of course, the criteria are vague. We have to judge from our own understanding. I would welcome clearer instructions from Sida on this.” (Member of reference group, AS)

The composition of scientific qualifications among the members of the reference groups in relation to the span and variation of research areas of the applications to be assessed was in general seen as sufficient (by the reference group members themselves). Hence, the need to involve external peer reviews to strengthen the base for

assessment of the individual applications was in general seen as superfluous by the members of the reference groups. The use of external peer-reviews seems to have diminished over the years since 2006. Interviewed members from all the reference groups reported that external peer reviews have been used only to very small degree and that they seldom understood the reasons why certain applications had been sent for external peer-review. The quality of the reviews was reportedly also shifting significantly, most of them being quite poor. Because no compensation was paid to the reviewers, Sida has not been in the position to demand a certain standard.

There is, within parts of the research community, a sense that the reference groups are not able to cover the width of all relevant research areas, particularly since research applications concern conditions and issues in a vast number of different countries. This, in combination with a lack of feedback on failed applications has among certain groups created a feeling of injustice. Among these, Sida's allocation process is held in lower esteem than the processes of other research councils. In certain cases this is given as an explicit motive for abstaining from applying from Sida. It has, however, not been possible to assess the spread of such opinions within the research community.

3.4 OUTSOURCING OF HEALTH RESEARCH TO THE SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL (VR) 2011-12

During 2011 and 2012, Sida has contracted the Swedish Research Council (VR) to administer and assess all applications within the area of global health. 10 MSEK has been allocated to the funding of new projects each of the years. This amount has been transferred to the Research Council together with the responsibility to assess the applications, which in 2012 were slightly less than one hundred. 13 projects have been funded in the 2011 call and 16 in the 2012 call.

The transfers have primarily been made in order to ease the administrative workload at Sida, benefitting from the fact that the reference groups of Sida and at the Research Council earlier were working to a large extent in parallel. The transfer was also seen as a way to deal with prejudices claiming that quality should have been lower in the research receiving finance from Sida.

The Research Council made the calls for applications to the Sida-funded research. Assessments of applications were dealt with by the reference group on public health and caring sciences, including global health; and by the reference group on infection, including global health. There is within the Research Council no reference group focusing exclusively on global health, hence this sub merger into existing reference groups.

The transfer from Sida to the Research Council has not been without tensions. In particular, the issue of including and assessing development relevance has created difficulties. The Research Council did not include any relevance criteria in the call of 2011. Reportedly, such reference was left out despite several notifications done by Sida staff. According to sources at the Research Council the assignment from Sida came too late in the application process for 2011 to be discussed and included. In any case, the reference groups were not allowed to use relevance criteria for their assessments, since this would have implied that assessments would have been based on criteria other than those that the applicants were aware of at the time of applying.

The call in 2012 contained global health as an invitation area. A text jointly agreed by VR and Sida describing the area was published. However, this text was formulated in a quite general and open manner, where research on global health was described as including studies on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and epidemiology of health from the individual to the population level as well as research related to all aspects of the healthcare system. Notably, global health research was formulated from an international (global) perspective – not from the perspective of poverty and low-income countries. Low-income countries were only mentioned implicitly in relation to the need for international collaboration. Poverty or poverty reduction was not mentioned at all.

This text is by VR considered to provide necessary relevance criteria. Sida staff considers the text to be a description of an area, and not relevance criteria. Sida staff had therefore proposed a set of relevance criteria, and argued for their inclusion in the call, something which has not been considered by VR. The formats for application in both the calls did not contain obligations to describe relevance.

There has been lack of clarity about responsibilities, and high staff turnover both at Sida and VR during this period. More generally, communication between the Swedish Research Council and Sida has occasionally been poor, according to several sources. Differences in views about levels of formality seem to have been one factor involved, along with divergences in views on how to treat development relevance.

Since VR has limited competence in the area of “global health”, the research advisor responsible for this portfolio at Sida was asked to scrutinize all the applications during the 2012 round, in order to compare notes with the VR staff’s assessment of relevance. Neither of these scrutinies had any impact on formal decisions, but served as a back-up check of relevance. The officer did also participate in the VR assessment meeting, albeit as a silent observer.

Directly following the allocation process, during the last part of the assessment meeting, the Sida officer had an opportunity to describe and inform about the relevance criteria that Sida had put together at an earlier stage. According to sources, members of the reference groups at the Research Council expressed their liking of such relevance criteria, asked for the opportunity to apply them, or – even better – for Sida to resume responsibility for assessing development relevance.

The limited knowledge about the subject area “global health” at VR, both at staff level and within reference groups, seems to have been problematic for applications in this field. Sida staff claim that treatment of applications would have been different if handled by Sida, since it was not research quality that led to lower allocations to such applications. One argument advanced was that reference groups would benefit from bringing in expertise from the World Health Organization to assess applications focusing on diseases prevalent in poor countries.

The financing modalities constitute another area where issues have not been finally resolved. VR allocates funding for five years, a period during which those who have received funding are not eligible to apply again from the Council. The finance transferred from Sida is allocated only for three years, which implies that those who receive funding will encounter a funding gap for two years – without having the possibility to apply for additional funding from VR for this period, due to the Council’s regulations.

In conclusion, the transfer of global health research to the Research Council has been complicated. It seems that Sida staff have assessed the situation as more problematic compared to staff from VR. Doubtless, the most problematic area has been the consideration of relevance in the handling of the calls and the assessment process. The exclusion of relevance criteria in the 2011 and 2012 call implies the risk that allocated funds have not been used as prescribed by the strategy for research cooperation. However, funding may still have been allocated to projects that are of relevance to development. However, the system for allocation cannot guarantee that this is the case, which must be considered a default.

During the 2012 call the general problem of defining the criteria of relevance in the program became evident. Even though the many problems associated with transfer may be of temporary nature the problem of relevance in the program requires a clear stand from Sida and by extension the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. For the future handling of the entire program at the Research Council the issue of relevance is imperative. The Research Council has also stressed the need for a clear position on the issue of relevance. The following narrative underlines this:

“We need detailed instructions for handling of this program otherwise there is risk that it will be merged into the regular calls of the council. The Research Council has no competence in this field so if any relevance criteria should be applied clear instructions must come from Sida or the Government. We also need to strengthen our competence in terms of staff members.”(High official at the Swedish Research Council)

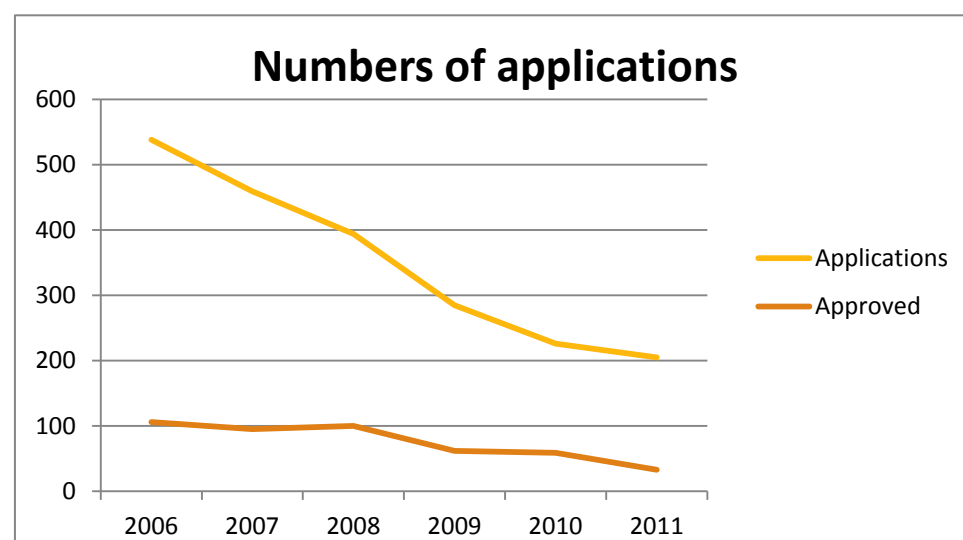
4 Effects and Results of the Programme

Given these changes in the way the programme has been managed during the assessed period, and the shifts in allocation of funds to it, we now turn to look at the effects of the programme. Thereafter we will assess the programme.

4.1 OVERALL STATISTICS

The number of applications for funding from the program has steadily decreased during the period 2006-2012.⁶ This decrease follows an application peak in 2005, when a total of 566 applications were filed. In 2011 the number had reached a low of 205 – a level not experienced over the last two decades. The number of applications has decreased for all the disciplinary groups, but as a share the decrease has been more severe in humanities, in technology and in environmental studies.

Table 4: Applications by year

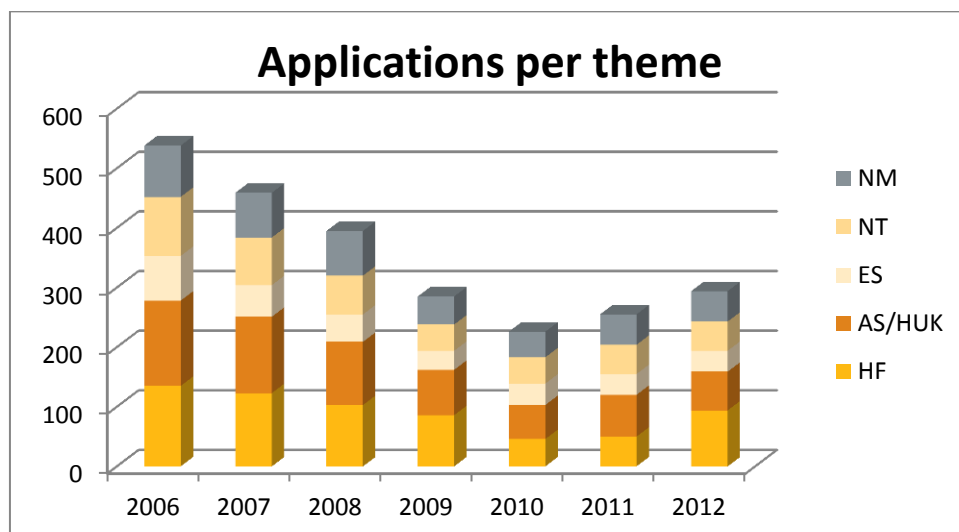


⁶ When applications in the health research area for 2011 and 2012 (transferred to the Swedish Research Council) are included, a slight recovery was noticed for these years. However, these statistics are estimates, since applications that earlier were filed with the Research Council are hard to separate from those earlier filed with U-forsk.

Table 4 indicates a clear and rapid decline in applications to the U-forsk programme. Health research applications for 2011 and 2012 are not included (see footnote).

A number of possible reasons for the decline have been proposed, most of which relate to changes in the programme that have taken place during the last six years. The most important factor is the large number of changes that have taken place within the programme. Formal and thematic conditions for funding have changed during the period, as well as the size of funding. All this has taken its toll on researchers confidence for the programme.

Table 5: Applications by scientific discipline



This diagram shows (contrary to table 4) a slight recovery in 2011 and 2012, since applications in the HF field are included. However, these figures are rough estimates, since no reliable statistics exists particularly for 2011.

In the 2007 application the possibility to fund doctoral students was discontinued and support should instead be channelled to postdoctoral projects. While support to PhD projects constituted some 31 per cent of total applications in 2006, it disappeared totally the year after, while applications for postdoctoral projects never managed to exceed 7 per cent, and has generally stayed at around 4 per cent.

This change may in itself have contributed to the drop in applications:

“Earlier you would file one application as a supervisor for a PhD candidate, together with an application for your own project. Since the PhD projects were removed, you would file just one application.” (Researcher, AS)

An underlying problem in Swedish research of relevance for development is that researchers to a large degree are spread across various university departments. This follows from a historical principle in development research funding of keeping researchers integrated into ordinary university departments. The purpose was to keep scientific quality high through adherence to disciplinary methods and theories. As a

consequence, no specific development research institutes have emerged in Sweden. Another indirect effect has been that development research largely has focused micro level and local issues. Engagement with macro level and aggregated research questions has been sparser. In order to somewhat make up for this, Sida had in 2009 decided to aim the programme funding towards larger projects than earlier. This partly came in response to recommendations from the 2006 evaluation. However, when information about this shift was spread, and applications with somewhat higher proposed budgets had arrived, the government decided to cut down on funding for the programme. This led to major frustration among several researchers.

In reaction, Sida decided for the following year to change the direction of the programme, making the thematic invitation areas strictly to follow the government priorities for the policy for global development (PGD). The explicit purpose was to make the programme more selective in order to attract fewer applications. There was high uncertainty within Sida about how much money would be available to distribute in addition to the money that saw already committed to on-going research projects. The increased selectivity of the programme was seen as a means to somewhat decrease researcher frustration.

In addition to these changes, internal re-organisation within Sida has had effects on the programme as well. With the integration of research secretaries into Sida country teams and into field offices, resources for the administration of the programme have shrunk considerably. What in earlier years were undertaken as shared responsibilities between all the research advisors (who at the time were placed within the research department) was confined to mainly one research advisor and one support staff. One of the consequences of this reorganization has been that scientific feedback to researchers on their applications has been minimized. During 2011 and 2012 the task of providing feedback has been transferred to members of the reference groups, who have complained about a too heavy work load. Hence, feedback has remained short and general in character. Such weak or lacking feedback may also have contributed to a decreasing number of applications, since possibilities to improve the quality and relevance of a proposal that has been turned down have diminished considerably. Without information about the weaknesses of an application it is very hard to improve on its quality. This lack of feedback has also caused researchers to abstain from applying from Sida. One researcher puts it this way:

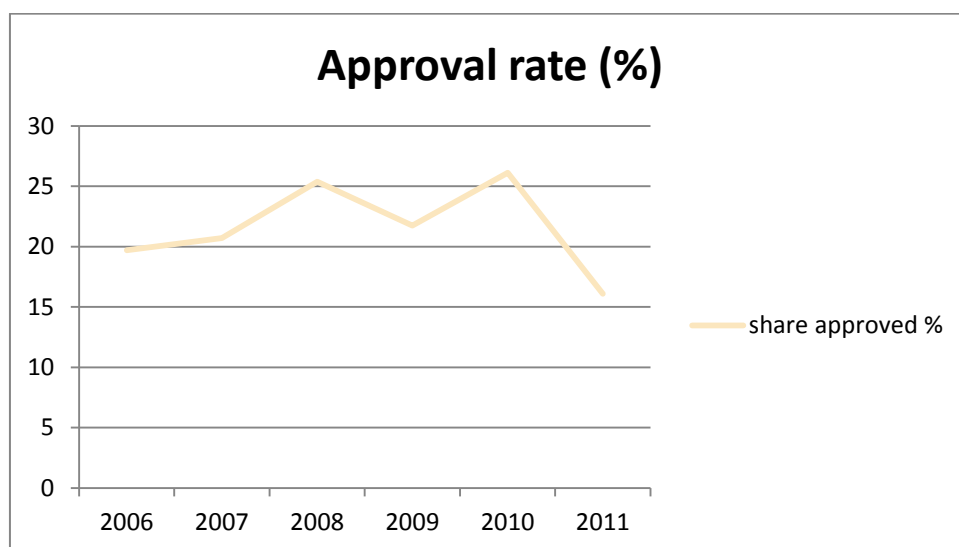
“I and many of my colleagues are very disillusioned. We say ‘never again’, because we cannot know what is wrong with our proposals since we don’t get any feedback. I have studied eight previously successful applications to learn, I choose the most topical issues and work for a month to write eight pages. But I still don’t know what is wrong with my application.” (Researcher, AS)

There may as well be more structural reasons contributing to the decreasing number of applications. With differences between low-, middle- and high income countries becoming less pronounced, with global connections and global challenges growing in importance, the concept of “development” is becoming increasingly vague. From this

follows that the research field “development studies” also is becoming increasingly vague, and hence less attractive. It is not uncommon that young researchers active in fields earlier labelled as “development studies” strive to avoid this labels in the interest of promoting their academic careers.

Against such a backdrop it is not unlikely that volatility in funding, and shifting directions of the U-forsk programme may have created a situation where researchers rather seek other sources of finance, which are perceived as more stable over the long run.

Table 6: share of approved applications



The percentage of approved applications has remained around, or slightly above, 20 per cent throughout the period. This may be compared with the share of approved applications from the Swedish Research Council, where the share has been between 11 and 35 per cent, depending on disciplinary area during this period. A slight drop has occurred there during the last two years, with a span between 7 and 17 per cent in 2011.

The Riksbanken Jubileumsfond has kept a stricter profile with approval rates between 5,3 and 6,8 per cent during the 2006-2012 period. The research council FORMAS (sustainable development) has approved between 8,1 and 19 per cent during the period, with the lowest approval rate in 2012. Seen within this context, the U-forsk approval rate is high, but not the highest, and well within the frame of normality for Swedish research councils.

Average size of financial contributions. While the number of applications has decreased throughout the studied period, the average size of financial support to each project has constantly increased. In fact, it has doubled over the period from 466 000:- in average annual support per project in 2006, to 915 000:- in annual support per project in 2011. Increases in average support have been steady over the years, something which is shown in the following table:

Table 7: Average financial contributions to projects

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Ave. financial support (<i>thousand SEK</i>)	466	516	628	728	837	915	n a

Source: own calculations based on decision protocols, planning support excluded.

It may, against this backdrop seem somewhat strange that the number of applications have decreased so distinctly during the period. One could assume that the possibility of acquiring larger amounts of support rather would have attracted increasing numbers of applications. What has occurred during the period in terms of number of applications has happened despite this increase in average funding sizes. However, the 3-5 MSEK/ project that the evaluation of 2006 proposed as a reasonable size for research programmes have not been attained, despite attempts. This implies that the U-forsk channel has remained of limited use for those who work in medium sized teams on somewhat wider research issues.

“It is too small. If you are to work interdisciplinary you simply need to seek additional funding.” (Researcher, NM)

“This size does not allow for projects of excellence, therefore the programme becomes less interesting” (Researcher, NM)

What the quotations indicate is that there might be a trade-off between quality/excellence and ability to fund more projects, at least in some disciplinary fields. It may also be a trade-off between multi-disciplinarity and size of project grants. At the same time, research projects involving smaller groups or individuals may benefit well from current sizes of grants. The programme may be better suited for certain disciplines, such as some of the social sciences.

Universities, applications and approvals. Seen over the period 2006-2011, Lund University has produced the largest number of applications (274), followed by Uppsala University (272) and Gothenburg University (260). The Karolinska Institute (KI), Stockholm University and the Swedish Agricultural University (SLU) have also all filed between 200 and 250 applications each. However, this comparison suffers from the fact that health related applications were transferred to the Swedish Research Council in 2011. Among the universities that dominate, Stockholm University (240) and Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences (205) should also be mentioned. Behind these, there is quite a sharp drop to the next (Royal Institute of Technology with 126).

Annual rankings of applications result in the same order, with the only change that Uppsala University replaces Lund University at the top. As a consequence of the generally lower number of applications towards the end of the period, Gothenburg University and SLU have recently emerged among the top applicants, whereas Uppsala and Stockholm Universities have fallen somewhat behind. Lund University has regained a leading position after a dip.

When looking more closely at the statistics, it appears that particular departments and institutions at each of the Universities are quite frequent when producing applications.

Within each of the universities there is specialization. At Lund University it is social sciences (sociology, cultural geography and economics) together with technology that dominate. Uppsala University is mainly producing applications from health, humanities and social sciences (peace and conflict, political science, anthropology), and Gothenburg University is strongest in health and social science (Global studies, economics). Stockholm University is strongest in environment (systems ecology), technique and social sciences (geography, political science). Within the U-forsk thematic groups there are also some agglomerations. In the natural science and environment (NM) thematic group applications from SLU and Stockholm University dominate; In the natural science and technology (NT) group applications from Lund University and the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) dominate; the health research (HF) group is dominated by applications from the KI and applications treated in the social science groups mainly come from the Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm and Uppsala Universities. With decreasing numbers of applications, concentration has been even further emphasized.

When it comes to approvals, some universities tend to be more successful than others. Gothenburg and Stockholm universities are the two universities that during all of the years in the period have had an approval rate above the average (often around 30 per cent). Uppsala, Lund and the Karolinska Institute have also had approval rates above the average on more than one year. Among the larger applicants mentioned above, it is only the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences that has not reached an approval rate above the average on any single year.

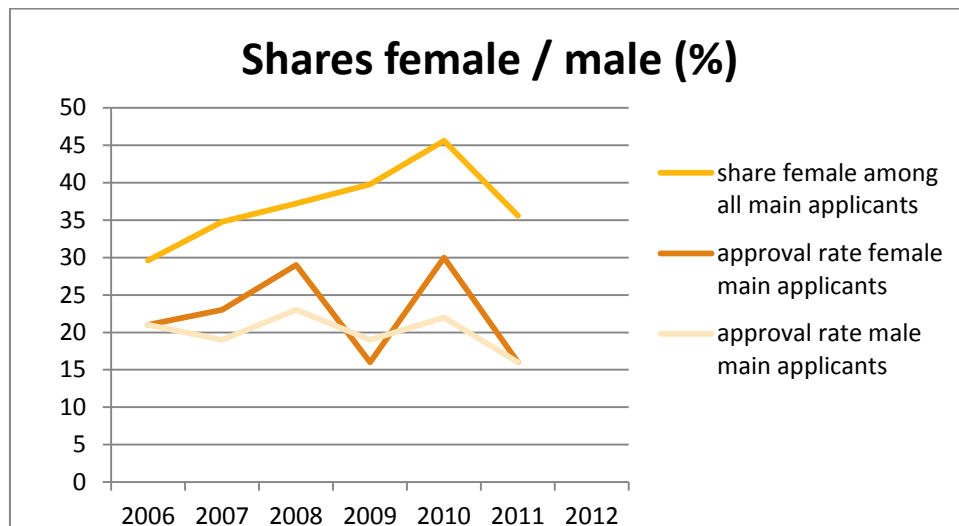
Among universities and institutes applying for funding less often, the approval rate tends to be lower. It is only Umeå University, the Swedish Institute for Communicable Disease Control, together with the Swedish Meteorological Institute and the Nordic Africa Institute that have managed to achieve above average approval rates when contributing substantive numbers of applications.

With decreasing shares of doctoral and postdoctoral projects, the picture is one where applications increasingly come from more senior researchers – at least as main applicants. To the extent that younger researchers take part in applications it is increasingly as co-applicants. The renewal of the Swedish resource base of researchers active in development relevant research seems to have become increasingly difficult. However, this analysis is somewhat imprecise, since we have not been able to control the seniority of co-applicants.

Share of female main applicants. There has been a clear trend of an increasing share of applications filed by female main applicants. In 2006 this share stood at 30 per cent while in 2010 it had increased to 47 per cent following increases each year. In 2011 it dropped back to 37 per cent. This statistics reflect the share of female main applicants, and not the total share of female researchers benefitting from funding. The single most important reason for the decrease in 2011 was the move of the applications

in the field of health research to the Swedish Research Council. This disciplinary group has been the most gender balanced over the years, when it comes to applicants.

Table 8: Share of female main applicants



Source: calculations based on decision protocols.

While the share of applications by female main applicants has steadily increased, the referees have generally been gender blind when it comes to the allocation of funds. Half of the years, female main applicants have attained somewhat higher approval rates as compared to their share of total applications. One year the opposite was the case, whereas two years have resulted in absolutely similar shares. This is an indication that quality and relevance assessments have guided the selection, rather than a search for gender balance. This is a quite natural result, given the selection criteria, but nevertheless an important finding.

Share of young researchers. The same smooth developments have not occurred when it comes to project applications by young researchers (within 3 years of their PhD). In 2006, it was still possible to receive funding for PhD projects. This window was closed in 2007. After that year only those who had already received PhD project funding could be prolonged. In 2006, the PhD share of applications amounted to some 27 per cent of total project applications (excluding planning applications). Later in the period attempts have been made at distinguishing “young” (within 3 years of PhD) main applicants. The comparison is not straightforward, but may serve as an indication. The share of young main applicants was 25 per cent in 2009, 16 per cent in 2010 and 36 per cent in 2011. The share of approved applications for young applicants did also fluctuate widely. In 2009 it was 20 per cent; in 2010 it was 28 and in 2011 it turned down to 11 per cent. One conclusion from these figures is that the decrease in applications has been caused by decreases in applications from both senior and junior applicants alike.

4.2 ASSESSING THE PROGRAMME

This section will provide assessments of the programme, in relation to its overall usefulness and when it concerns quality and relevance of research. Assessments will also be made of instruments and mechanisms aimed at increasing the use of research results.

4.2.1 The overall objective of the programme

Given the complexity of research activities, assessing the overall impact of the U-forsk programme is a difficult task. Hence, some methodological demarcations have to be made. The use of bibliometric studies based on citation indexes is currently the most applied and recognized method of assessing the impact of research.⁷ However, this method has limitations both in terms of assessing quality of research, especially outside the mainstream, and in terms of assessing relevance. It is in addition quite time consuming. Therefore, we have to large extent based our analysis and assessment on interviews with selected stakeholders that are linked to the program in various ways.

The respondents were asked the overall question “What function does the U-forsk program hold in the Swedish research funding system?” The answers given displayed a quite uniform picture. Among all the groups of stakeholders, respondents expressed a strong support for the program and its relevance in the Swedish research funding system. The main perceived effect from the programme concerns increased interest for development relevant issues among Swedish researchers at the universities. This has to do with difficulties in finding other sources of finance for such research projects or programmes. The “U-forsk” programme is perceived as filling a gap when it comes to internationalisation of Swedish research. Without such a programme, research focus and interest reaching beyond the Western world and possibly parts of Asia would have been much weaker. The following narratives give some illustration of this:

“I think the program is more important than ever. Global development questions that include developing countries are a growing research field. U-forsk has long been in the forefront of supporting this kind of research.” (Researcher, AS)

⁷ The information from these studies can say something on the spread and use of research within the research system but very little or nothing about its appliance in society.

“Yes there is a very strong need. There is a need to have knowledge on global issues and that kind of research is not funded elsewhere.”(Member of reference group, HF)

“If I look at my research and development related research done by colleagues at my department I think none of the projects would have been possible without funding from the programme.” (Researcher, HF)

Many respondents repeatedly returned to the position of the research support within Sida in general, particularly pointing at the effects of the recent years of reorganization. There was a strong opinion among many respondents (not being part of Sida) that the program had been negatively affected by what was considered as a down prioritization of research at Sida. Most respondents took this position in relation to how they perceived the role and position of the research support at Sida through SAREC prior to the 2008 reorganization. These narratives give some illustration of this:

“The last years of reorganizations at Sida have been a catastrophe for the support to research. U-forsk was part of an integrated organization... with an entire department of very qualified people. It is still around, but seems very floating with very few people involved from Sida, which of course affects the quality.” (Researcher, NM)

“I have some insights into the work of other research councils and from what I see the last years of organizational turmoil at Sida have definitely had a down-grading effect on the status of U-forsk. I mean, it was not particularly highly ranked before, but that was more because of ignorance to the field. Now it is more mistrust of its capability.” (Researcher and former member of reference group, HF)

“The closure of SAREC was a very unwise decision, which I think have affected the quality of the research support in general, U-forsk included. I have for a long time been involved in many different programs at Sida, not only research, and from my experience SAREC was one of the best functioning operation at Sida, with an international trademark that was unique. Sida and Sweden for that matter has really lost something here.” (Researcher, NM)

From interviews with members of the reference groups, researchers and Sida staff we can conclude that, despite some concerns for its organization and management, there is unanimous support for the idea of a program like U-forsk. However, at the level of identifying specific objective(s) the picture becomes more nuanced. There seems to be variation in what is seen as the primary objective of the program, spanning from developing internationally high class research in the field (production of research), the building of a resource base for the Swedish development cooperation (national capacity building) to facilitation of cooperation between Swedish researchers and researchers in developing countries (bilateral capacity building). These views correspond fairly well with earlier objectives as stated in the government's appropriation letters prior to the current policy and strategy of 2010. However, in the policy and strategy there is clear priority given to the first objective (production of research). This finding may give rise to some concern. If there are different views on the primary objective of program among those that are appointed to assess and select the re-

search applications, this may lead to divergences in how various qualifications in these applications are assessed and weighted which in turn could affect the direction and scope of the program.

The question of impact of the research funded by the program concerned four areas:

- Development related research in Sweden;
- The international production of research,
- The knowledge production in low income countries
- Knowledge and operation at Sida.

Regarding the first area, and relating to the previous question about relevance in the national research context, almost all the respondents saw the program as crucial for the funding of Swedish research on development issues.

“Without U-forsk I think there would have been very little of this type of research at Swedish universities. For any researcher interested in these issues there are few or I would say no other funding sources.” (Researcher, AS)

The unique position of the U-forsk programme is, however, not always assessed as something positive. In the 2006 evaluation study and elsewhere it has been argued that the programme has made it possible for other research councils to avoid taking responsibility for development relevant research. Such a crowding-out effect was mentioned by quite a few respondents. They meant that the specific objective and scope of the U-forsk programme had sent strong territorial signals to other research councils. These had consequently removed support to development related research from their research agendas. Hypothetically some respondents also argued that since the size of the program in terms of funding was considered relatively small its isolation could over the years have had a negative impact on the diversity of research in the field.

A common criticism is also that the programme is underfinanced. In addition to financing few projects, the size of financial envelopes allocated is such that it is hard to involve large enough groups of researchers in the projects. Hence, the call for multi-disciplinarity is difficult to respond to, since this often would demand larger budgets. Another part of this critique is that the programme don't allow for joint applications from researchers based in Sweden and in low income countries.

Assessments of international research impact varied significantly between scientific disciplines. Within social sciences there seemed to be greater uncertainty as compared to other disciplines. This had, according to some respondents, to do with the specific nature of social sciences, where research frontlines were not as clearly defined as in other disciplines. In medicine and natural science there was on the contrary a very strong belief that the research had had a significant international impact, for example in research on malaria, HIV/Aids and tuberculosis. A frequent remark concerned the relation between available resources for research, its operation and presumed impact. Some reference group members meant that the practice of cutting in project budgets,

in the interest of increasing the total number of supported projects, had affected international impact negatively. The cuts, together with lacking feedback from Sida on their rationale, had caused uncertainty among researchers. The following narrative illustrates this:

“There is too little money in the program to cover all scientific disciplines. To just cut in the budgets of the projects may not be the right priority. Sida may approve the application but cut the budget to half. Then you have to reconsider the project, but on what grounds? What half of the project did Sida like? Either Sida should support the project so the entire proposed research question could be answered, or Sida should give some guidance for the budget cuts. Personally I think concentration to fewer fully financed projects will increase the international scientific impact of the program.”(Researcher, HF)

What many of interviewed Sida staff hold forward as an ideal (and what is also part of the objectives in the governments research strategy) is that the “U-forsk” programme should complement both the bilateral capacity building programmes, and the regional and global research programmes and organisations that Sida supports. This way, the programme would impact on research in low income countries. With reorganisations within Sida over the last few years, these complementarities have evaporated, and are now seen as largely absent. It can, however, be noted that current Sida staff still see this as an ideal to strive for.

In general, very few respondents had a clear picture on what the program’s impact on the knowledge production and appliance in low-income countries has been. The overall impression was that the impact was relatively weak. However, medicine stood out as an area where respondents to larger extent believed that the research produced in the program was further applied and developed in low-income countries. Part of an explanation could be that some of the projects in medicine were linked to ongoing projects in the bilateral research cooperation. Even in other disciplines those cases that involved strong linkages between bilateral research collaboration and research funded by the U-forsk programme were the ones that had impact in low-income countries.

A frequently stressed factor behind the weak link to low-income countries was the lack of opportunity for joint application and funding. The fact that the research funding is so intimately tied to the Swedish part, with no option for salaries on the cooperative partner’s side, was seen a major impeding factor for the development of jointly operationalized research projects. The formal requirement of having a collaborating counterpart in a low-income country was generally seen as trustworthy, but since it meant no sharing of resources for research it was in practice not a component that increased the research collaboration and by that the conditions for impact in low-income countries. The below narratives give word to this:

“Researcher and institutions in developing countries are pretty tired of signing these letters of collaboration to fulfil the requirements of the program. With current situation at many universities in Africa, there are no opportunities for them to take part in

the collaboration without external funding. Everyone knows this and still no modifications in the program have been made.” (Researcher, NM)

“If there is no option for change to increase research resources, such as salaries, on the cooperative institution’s part I think there should be more twinning with the bilateral cooperation.” (Researcher, AS)

“You have to bypass the rules if you are to establish collaboration in low-income countries. People are not ready to work for free. I just recently heard very strong complaints about this at a conference: ‘you come from abroad, get your material, write your book and get promoted. You don’t treat us as equals’, they said.” (Researcher, AS)

“Increasing the impact of research in the countries of concern is tricky. Researchers are generally no good communicators. I think Sida has a role to play here in disseminating and communicating the results of the research in the program. Sida is not active in this area, as I see it.” (Researcher, NM)

The question of research impact on Sida’s activities brought the strongest reactions among categories of respondents. The general impression was that Sida’s capacity to link the results from research to their own learning and operation was very weak, and mechanisms for this lacking. Scientific reports emanating from the programme are largely left unread and archived. Researchers approaching Sida to inform about results are, with a few shining exceptions, not received. Since many researchers saw the provision of research based knowledge to development aid as a primary objective, the observed poor engagement at Sida was seen as particularly troublesome. The weak capacity or lack of willingness (as some expressed it) was perceived as a problem that had been there since the inception of the program. However, the downsizing of administrative resources in recent years has not brought any improvements in this regard.

Respondents also pointed to the importance of engagement from the academia itself. It was stressed that researchers and universities have to be more active in communicating research results with Sida, for example by organizing conferences, seminars and workshops on themes relevant to Sida and the development cooperation in general. With the current weak capacity at Sida it was generally considered that the task of bridging research and policy development has to be a shared one, built on jointly structured premises.

“The use of research at Sida has always been a problem. There are many interesting results produced in this program that could benefit Sida in several ways, but there is very little communication. Apart from a few research conferences arranged by SAR-EC, where few outsiders participated, there have to my knowledge not been any initiatives trying to link research and policy at Sida in a more structured manner.” (Researcher,)

4.2.2 Assessing the quality of research

Quality in research is currently at the centre of much debate in academic and public policy circles. On a general level the policy focus on quality emanates from a belief among politicians and policy makers that the quality of scientific research is uneven and sometimes too low, which make its appliance in society both unpredictable and difficult to assess. Another aspect of this policy discussion is the lack of consensus on how quality should be measured in terms of standards. At the core of this debate is also a belief that policy itself can increase the quality in research.

The issue of research quality has a high priority in the Swedish research policy context. In the two latest Bills on research, the Government has presented two main instruments to increase quality. In the 2008 Bill a system for performance based resource allocation to the universities was introduced. Half of the total research budget to the universities was to be subject to competition with help from indicators on extent of external funding, scientific production in form of publications and citations, number of staff with a Ph.D. degree and number of female professors. One part of this competitive reallocation was also to be based on quality evaluations. In the recent 2012 Bill quality remains a priority. The Government proposes that the existing system is supplemented by the use of international peer-review as basis for university allocations. These collegial evaluations should both assess scientific quality and relevance for society. The Swedish Research Council (VR) is commissioned to investigate and propose a model for the implementation of this criterion.

Hence, from a national policy perspective we can conclude that the issues of quality in research more than ever (at least in terms of policy ambitions to assert influence on it) should be a primary prerequisite for research resource allocation. Despite well-known difficulties in measuring quality of research and the limitations in existing methods for evaluation, the Government concludes that certain criteria should be decisive in the assessment.

An initial question to stakeholders in the U-forsk programme was what quality criteria they considered to be most important. The answers revealed that originality of the project's research question was seen as the most important criterion. However, the connotation of the concept "originality" proved to have a certain span. For most of the respondents, this concept was closely linked to the issue of relevance, the ability to formulate an exclusive research question in a context that is either considered relevant per se or in which the research question itself constituted a relevant specialization in a field. To others originality was not so much about relevance, but about the ability to pose a significant, important question that can be investigated empirically and that could contribute to the knowledge base in specific area - more driven by curiosity than by appliance and usefulness. We could discern a certain pattern varying with the scientific disciplines. Reference group members from health, technology and the natural sciences tended to attribute a greater value to the connection with the relevance criterion in the assessment of quality compared with representatives from the social sciences and humanities.

“The ability to formulate a specific and unique research question relevant to people living in poverty is by far the most important marker of quality in my assessments. If I don’t see the potential for an appliance of the research I usually give low scores, even though they are sometimes theoretically and methodologically well founded.” (Reference group member, NT)

“Quality is about originality, the ability to pose either a unique and interesting research question or to tackle an already explored area from a different angle or with a different set of tools. I see relevance as a subordinate criterion to scientific originality and feasibility.” (Reference group member, AS)

The variation in what was considered quality in a research application made it difficult to get an accurate and unison assessment of the overall quality of the applications to the program. Nevertheless, the interview results showed that most members of the reference groups judged the quality to be generally high, with some exceptions. It was noted in responses from members in the reference group for the social sciences and humanities that the level of quality varied between applications. There was agreement that some of the applications within the field of social science seemed to be more of political rather than scientific projects. The field where quality of in the applications most unanimously was assessed to be high was health research. This assessment was further reinforced by the experience gained through the Swedish Research Council’s administration of the support for research on global health in 2011 and 2012. Many of the same researchers and research projects that earlier had received support from Sida did also receive support from the Swedish Research Council. This could be seen both as a general sign of quality and a proof of a functioning quality control at Sida. The general view on the high quality was further strengthened by the fact that some members of the reference groups were or had been members of similar groups at other research councils and thus could compare.

“I see the scientific quality as generally high. The projects that make it to the end are very competitive by international standards.” (Reference group member, HF)

“I have some experiences from assessing applications also at the Swedish Research Council and from what I have seen, there are no differences in quality. I know there is a general opinion, both among research councils and researchers that the research funded from Sida is of lower quality. I have not seen any proof of this in my field.” (Reference group member, NT)

“The quality is quite uneven, spanning from very poor to excellent, but the projects that receive support are generally of high quality.” (Reference group member, AS)

Regardless of discipline or subject area, general weaknesses in the applications centred on methodological shortcomings. In particular young researchers with limited field work experience were reported to have difficulties in operationalizing projects. Quite a few of these projects had an interesting and original purpose but were given low scores because of problem of demarcation and weaknesses in the methodological approach. To improve the quality of applications from young researchers, respondents

pointed to the need to involve partners from low-income countries as active researchers in the programme. It was believed that this would have a significant effect on the quality of the applications, especially among young researchers.

“Context specific knowledge is vital for success. Carrying out research in developing countries could be quite challenging even for senior researchers. If one could involve researchers from partner institutions in developing countries I think it would really improve the quality, both in terms of identifying interesting research questions and their execution.” (Reference group member, AS)

An interesting observation made was that members of the reference groups frequently reported that they had noted an increase in quality over time. The increase in quality was observed by members in all the reference groups. A possible explanation given by the respondents was the increasingly intense competition in the academy and the reduced intake of graduate students at Ph.D. level.

4.2.3 Assessing relevance of research

The concept of research relevance for low-income countries is complex and the understanding of it differs widely between researchers, reference group members, Sida staff as well as between members within all these three groups. This implies that the application of relevance criteria in the programme has been a contested area over the years, and continues to be so. Should it be interpreted as relevance for societal development processes, relevance for a certain group of countries, or even relevance for certain categories of people?

The interviews have shown that at least three different perspectives on the issue of relevance are represented:

- a) Some regard relevance as *characteristics* of particular research questions and/or research projects.
- b) Others perceive of it as *qualities of a research process*, pertaining to the way research is carried out, where in particular collaboration with researchers from low-income countries allows for engagement with real-life issues in particular contexts.
- c) Others still regard relevance as more *contextual* and something that may be defined through an *iterative* process in which various competencies are represented.

Depending on which perspective is chosen the role of relevance criteria will differ. If relevance is the result of a particular process, or emerges out of contextual discussions, then it would be difficult to formulate in sentences written down on paper. What relevance is may even differ from one research area to another. If, on the other hand, relevance is seen as characteristics of a research question, then a number of delimitations may be done and common criteria may emerge. For instance, geographical and thematic delimitations may be done. It may also be discussed whether relevance should imply issues that development agencies, such as Sida, are working on,

or whether it should relate to issues of importance to governments and populations in low income countries. These may be, but are not always, the same.

It is noteworthy that such divergent views on research relevance remains with staff and other actors involved in the programme. The programme has existed for 35 years, and relevance for low income (earlier “developing”) countries is its very *raison d’être*. A background to the unclear situation that is prevailing today is re-organisations within Sida. As long as the research department was kept integrated, work with applications within the programme was a shared responsibility for all research advisors. Having read each a set of applications, the staff met for a retreat when the issue of relevance was discussed in relation to all applications. Each advisor had to argue for, and defend their assessment of relevance. Relevance criteria constituted something of a shared knowledge that had emerged over the years, after discussions between experienced staff. When research advisors stepwise were transferred to other parts of Sida, in 2008, the assessment of relevance increasingly became the task of reference group members. With this shift, the need for written criteria emerged. However, the production of such criteria has been late in coming.

4.3 CO-OPERATION AND SYNERGIES

Central to the U-forsk programme is that it shall not be seen in isolation. The programme is financed by, and forms part of, Swedish development cooperation. Hence it is meant to serve a function in this context, rather than being just any research funding programme. We will in the following dwell on the synergies that are expected to emerge out of the programme.

4.3.1 Synergies between U-forsk and bilateral programmes

Links and synergies between the U-forsk and other parts of Sida’s research support have over the years been weak. This was the conclusion already in the 2006 evaluation of the Swedish research cooperation. During the period 2006-2012 such synergies have been further weakened, especially due to the internal reorganisations taking place during the last few years. Where synergies after all have been achieved is mainly in the interface between the U-forsk programme and the bilateral support programmes. A number of Swedish researchers receiving finance through U-forsk have also been involved in capacity building activities within the bilateral programmes. However, this has been less a result of active and specific matching from the part of Sida than a reflection of the fairly limited Swedish resource base available for contributing to capacity building work in low income countries. There has been a high probability that researchers capable of contributing to the bilateral programmes will also be competitive in the search for research funding.

Examples come from all disciplinary areas where Swedish university departments, or individual researchers are involved in bilateral capacity building programmes and simultaneously receive funds from the U-forsk programme. Furthermore it happens that researchers receiving funding from U-forsk later turn up as active partners in bilateral capacity building programmes. In that sense, the U-forsk programme has served the purpose of building the Swedish resource base for research capacity building.

For researchers, research groups or departments that have managed to acquire U-forsk funding, to participate in bilateral and to match this with other sources of funding often in entrepreneurial ways, the U-forsk support may in hindsight be seen as strategic support both to building capacity in Sweden, in low-income countries and to enhanced research collaboration. However, such examples are relatively few, and highly dependent on strong leadership and dedication. A major difficulty for such entrepreneurs is the lack of timing between the two programmes as well as a lack of long term commitment (beyond three to five years) from Sida's part.

One example may illustrate some of the difficulties in long-term planning. Up to 2006/2007 one idea was that Swedish researchers or research institutes working with capacity building in bilateral programmes should be able to involve also Swedish doctoral students in the collaboration. An ideal situation would then be that doctoral students from low-income partner countries were financed through the capacity building programme, whereas Swedish doctoral students would be financed over the U-forsk programme, for involvement in the same research programme. However, when support to doctoral students were taken away from the U-forsk programme in 2007, such linkages became increasingly difficult to build and uphold.

Several organisational and other changes over the 2006-12 period have made it practically impossible for Sida to influence and enhance synergies. The instruments and mechanisms it had at hand to do this in 2006 have disappeared one after the other. The first shift came when research advisors due to work overload no longer were to assess the development relevance of research applications in the U-forsk programme. Members of the review groups might be equally competent to do such assessments. However, they don't have information on the content and direction of bilateral programmes, hence they cannot indicate relevance in this sense.

The next change came when the research secretariat was split and research advisors placed in separate units within Sida. In combination with recently high levels of staff turnover, communication between advisors working with the bilateral programmes and advisors working with the U-forsk programme has in reality become non-existent.

The third shift came with the introduction of competitive bidding. In the 2006 evaluation of Swedish research cooperation, a recommendation was made for a more open and transparent selection process of universities and research institutions to include in the Swedish bilateral research cooperation programmes. Following this recommendation of increased transparency and objectivity, Sida introduced a process of competi-

tive bidding for collaborators to the bilateral programmes. However, it was introduced only in 2012, hence it is too early to tell what effects on the composition of institutions and universities involved it will bring.

The bidding process implies that Sida will assign universities and research institutions for bilateral programmes based on cost structure and partner country university preferences. The result of these changes is that neither information channels nor allocation mechanisms any longer exist for Sida to reinforce synergies between the bilateral programmes on the one hand and the U-forsk programme on the other. Any synergies will in the future rather be the results of coincidences and initiatives from the researchers themselves, than outcomes of Sida's actions.

When possibilities to create linkages between the bilateral support programmes and U-forsk decreases, the critique against lack of funding options for low-income country researchers in the U-forsk programme becomes increasingly relevant, since synchronisation with bilateral research cooperation programmes become increasingly difficult.

4.3.2 Synergies between U-forsk and regional/global programmes

Factors seen as hindrances to synergies between the U-forsk programme and regional and global programmes are mainly linked to the financing modalities. The relatively minor amounts set aside to support Swedish researchers' collaboration with regional and international research institutes are sufficient for exchange and meetings, but not for research collaboration, it is argued. In comparison to researchers from Norway, Denmark or the Netherlands – or with the extreme case of France, where development assistance is only used for French researchers – it is more difficult for Swedish researchers to acquire national funding for collaboration with international research institutes. There are some options for doing post-doc research at such institutes, however, no windows for senior research collaborations financed with Swedish money with organisations such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the World Health Organisation or regional social science institutes in Latin America, Africa or Asia. This implies that the synergies between the U-forsk programme and regional and global research programmes supported by Sida are very scarce, and if they exist are fully dependent on the researchers involved and their own capacities.

4.3.3 Synergies between U-forsk and the Swedish development co-operation beyond research

As already mentioned, there is sharp critique among both researchers and Sida research advisors concerning the lack of interplay between the U-forsk programme and Swedish development cooperation more widely. However, such critique must be placed in context. The tensions between Sida's research program and other program areas within Sida have several different sources and components;

- At a structural level, Sida has for many years been involved in, and promoting sectoral development cooperation programmes, as well as general budget sup-

port. This implies that programmatic issues engaging Sida have become increasingly aggregated during a substantial number of years. It is a broad sectoral, or societal issue that mainly concerns Sida. At the same time, Swedish development research has been continuously largely dominated by micro level studies. This is partly a result of the way the U-forsk programme has been structured since its beginning, partly a result of the size of financing envelopes.

- At a content level, the poverty focus of Sida:s work may put research support into question. When it comes to working with people experiencing poverty, research activities are among those most distant from what these people undertake. Even if research can be very relevant for reducing poverty, the effects are indirect and may take long time to fruition, while people experiencing poverty are in need of immediate survival. To strike a balance between short term and immediate interventions on one hand, and long-term and indirect interventions on the other is very difficult. One could further add that views differ widely within and outside the academic community on ways and means whereby research should be available for and put to use in society.
- At a methodological level, research support and capacity building differs in important ways from support to other sectors. Time frames are generally longer in research, the character of results differs qualitatively from results in other sectors and the roles of stakeholders are different. Research capacity can only be built as an integrated part of the process of conducting research, and this is a long-term undertaking. High quality research is characterized by the impossibility to specify results in advance (if one could, research would be unnecessary). This calls for a different kind of planning process compared to other sectors. And the decision about how to allocate money must be given to scientific peers, which is quite different from when allocations are decided through normal bureaucratic procedures.
- At a collegial level, these methodological differences may lead to perceptions of otherness between research and other Sida staff, since working routines differ between them. The PhD requirement for research advisors may contribute to reinforce such sentiments.
- At a management level, requirements to simultaneously apply norms and routines general to all Sida work and norms and routines demanded from a scientific research council may contribute to tendencies of isolation of the research unit from other Sida units.

Such tensions at both structural and actor levels may at times take the form of conflicts between individuals representing different camps. Certain leading individuals have during the assessed period been identified with diverging positions, and tensions have at times been strong. Diverging views on how and to what extent research should be integrated into, and be useful for various parts of Sida:s work have been part of decisions leading up to recent re-organisations of Sida. Moving research advisors to country teams and to operational units is clearly motivated by the wish to better integrate research into Sida:s general programmes. However, it is also this wish for better integration that has led to sharply decreasing staff and other resources being allocated to the U-forsk programme.

Examples exists where Sida has had rather intense exchange with research programmes and researchers (E.g.; The former thematic unit NATUR and a research

project comparing Asia:s and Africa:s agricultural productivity; INEC and market development research; The ReCom programme on development effectiveness). However, research programmes involved have usually been financed by other sources than the U-forsk programme, and often been foreign (often based in the UK). Examples of exchange between researchers financed by U-forsk and Sida mainly include contacts initiated by the researchers themselves with the Swedish embassy in specific low-income countries. These contacts have sometimes evolved into long term and continuous working relations, with mutual and continuous exchange of information. In some cases this also includes regular consultations at headquarter level and with the MFA in Stockholm. However, cases are rare and have generally started with researcher initiatives.

4.4 PUTTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

The U-forsk programme has in various ways tried to contribute to the linking of research and practice. Questions of how research results are put to societal use have been a concern over the years. The programme has therefore contained certain funding mechanisms that have – at least as part of their objective – had the intention of increasing research availability and use. These will now be discussed.

4.4.1 Support to research networks

Support to the establishment of Swedish research networks was part of the U-forsk program from 2005 up to 2010. Due to budget constraints and staff cuts Sida was forced close the modality in the 2011 call. Although the budgetary situation has improved the staffing problem at the research unit has remained, which reportedly has been an impeding factor for the reopening of the modality in the calls for 2012 and 2013.

Looking at Sida's guiding instruction for the modality, the principle idea was to establish links between the Swedish research community and Sida, the Foreign Ministry and other relevant Swedish stakeholders to meet the need for more research based communication. The networks were to serve as forums where groups of researchers within particular fields of research could inform development cooperation actors about research findings and upcoming questions. The exchange of results and experiences in the network were also believed to feed the research community with new researchable questions. According to the guiding instruction the support was to target network building in the social sciences in principle, but was open to applications also from other disciplines. Main criteria in the assessment of the applications were the thematic approach, institutional preconditions, international contacts, working forms and co-financing.

The review has been able to identify support to totally 11 networks of which a majority is within the social sciences⁸. The number of applications over the years has been quite modest, with an average of 6-9 applications per call, including applications for continued support. The support given has been in form of either planning grants or full support, direct or after a planning grant. The level of full support has varied significantly between the networks, ranging from over 6 to 1 million SEK over a four years period. The level for planning grant has been 500 000 SEK for one year.

The evaluation focus has been on results of the networks in terms of activities and publication outcome and how the results relate to Sida's objective of the support. The assessment has been based primarily on results reports from six networks.

A review of the results reporting shows that the networks have mainly engaged in the following activities:

Development of the organization of the network. Because of the changing nature of research networks the development of organisational forms and operations should be an ever-present part of network activities. However, judging from the reports from some of the networks it seems as if this part has constituted a disproportionate part of the activities. Reporting has sometimes concerned the future organizational development more than the activities performed. However, this is an observation that perhaps not should be read as a criticism, but rather highlights the difficulty of finding common grounds for networks to achieve effective exchanges and cooperation. Building effective network takes a relatively long time. The period of time that the networks have received support from Sida may be too short.

Participation in or organization of seminars, workshops and conferences. This has been the main activity for most of the networks. To large extent, these types of activities have principally been targeting researchers within the networks, while having no or only vague policy bridging objectives. In other words, most of the activities seem to have been purely academic. In a few cases there has been an ambition to also involve policymakers. To what extent policymakers actually have participated remains in most cases unclear. Another important activity has been network members' indi-

⁸ The following networks have been supported: 1) Livelihoods, natural resources governance and environmental change in rural Sub Sahara Africa (SLU), 2) VAW Global network – research collaboration on violence against women (LIU), 3) Dev-net – Development Network: Environment, democratization and strategies of the poor (UU), 4) Child survival – reaching the target. A thematic network to promote research and advocacy (UU), 5) RENSAD: Swedish research network for sustainable agriculture and forestry for development (SLU), 6) GADNET: Gender and development (GU), 7) RESELA: Red Sueca de estudios Latino-Americanos (SU), SASNET: 8) Swedish South Asian studies network (LU), 9) PCDRNET: Network for peace, conflict and development research (UU), 10) SLU Omvärld (SLU) and 11) Research network in integrated water resources management (SLU).

vidual participation in international conferences. The support from some of the networks for this type of activity has been seen as important both for the thematic deepening and specialization of the network and for its international positioning.

Cooperation for joint research applications and publication projects. Most of the networks have reported that the support has partly been used for the planning of joint project proposals to various research councils. However, to what extent these applications have been successful has not been reported. Joint book and publication projects have also taken place within some networks. In some cases, jointly produced research have been published in highly ranked international journals.

Calls for planning grants, workshops and guest researchers. This activity was found only in one of the networks – the one with by far the largest budget. Within this network, there have been annual calls for planning grants to researchers being members of the network (45,000 to 75,000 USD). Separate annual calls have also been made for grants for the organization of interdisciplinary workshops (75 000 EUR) and grants for the guest lecture programs (20 000 SEK). The planning grant modality seems to be almost identical with corresponding grants at Sida. It is not clear from the reporting if the planning grants have contributed to any success to secure bigger grants from national research councils or elsewhere.

Construction of websites, newsletters and mailing lists. To varying extent all the networks reported to have spent resources on these types of tools for communication. Mailing lists have reportedly been the most essential and efficient instrument for communication in all the networks. Quite a few networks have also spent time constructing own websites, which reportedly have served an important interacting function both for communication within the network and for marketing and presentation of actives to a broader national and international audience. In a few cases networks have also published web-based newsletters.

Collaboration with international partner organisations and institutions. Linking up with international partner institutions seems to have been an important activity in most of the networks. Reportedly, its main purpose has been to strengthen the research profile and position of the network. These activities seem mostly have been performed by members of the networks on individual basis. In most cases, collaboration has concerned participation in conferences or seminars organised by the network or by the partner institution. In few cases the collaborations have resulted in joint research applications or joint publications.

Interaction with policy makers and practitioners. Despite being the principle objective in Sida's guiding instruction, explicit network activities targeting policymakers and other practitioners at Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) or other relevant stakeholders have according to available reporting in most cases been quite modest. Some networks have reported that they have organized what they call "policy conferences" or "policy seminars" to which officials from Sida and the MFA have been invited. To what extent these officials have participated is not reported, neither the outcome of the interaction. There seem to be no cases of joint organization be-

tween networks and stakeholders from the policy field. Some networks reported to have plans for specific policy-related seminars/workshops together with Sida, but add that the organizational development at Sida in the recent time has been an impeding factor.

In conclusion, the support to networks seems generally to have been successful in academic terms. The reports display engagement and results in most of the areas. The main focus has been on joint conferences, seminars and workshops. Developed communication tools are relevant and have contributed to the spread of the networks' research areas and their scientific outcomes. Most of the networks seem to have had an international outlook. An important function is also to provide a forum for different types of collaboration between researchers, such as joint research applications, projects and publications. The review has not been able to find strong proof for the existence of these kinds of outcomes. A possible explanation could be that these types of collaborative outcomes require some maturity within the network and that this has not yet been reached due to the relatively short period of support. The involvement of international partners in a network is important for its development and legitimacy both in academic and policy circles. An opening for international co-applicants should therefore be considered in any future calls.

However, the most striking conclusion concerns the networks relation to the policy field. The principle idea of the support was to establish links between the Swedish research community and Sida, the Foreign Ministry and other Swedish stakeholders. This core activity has only played a marginal role in most of the networks' activities. Hence, the initial ambition to bridge research and policy-making has not reached a level that corresponds to Sida's intentions with the modality. This is not to say that the networks necessarily should hold the full responsibility, since there are problems also at the practitioners' side.

For this type of bridging ambition to succeed, more than just the "policy" label in announcements of conferences and seminars is required. Practitioners need to be more actively involved as members of the network. Researchers and practitioners must work in cooperation when formulating agendas for the meeting them between. Otherwise, there is a high risk that practitioners will not participate. The activities of the networks are of importance to many functions at Sida, not just the research unit. That is why overall and inclusive policy functions on the recipient side of these types of communication processes are so important. Recent downscaling of policy functions both at Sida and the MFA is however not speaking in favour to this type knowledge communication. This is a fact that needs to be considered in a possible future support to networks.

4.4.2 Support to invitation areas

Support to specific invitation areas was part of the U-forsk programme from 2006 up to 2008. According to the information given in "information to applicants" the main objective was to engage Swedish institutions in knowledge and capacity development

within fields of particular importance to areas of contribution in the development support from Sida. Preference was given to applications with an integrated approach to the development within a specific invitation area. The choice of thematic areas was made by the research department (SAREC) or by other departments at Sida. In case of the latter the concerned department set aside a separate budget. Degrees of specification in announcements and instructions varied significantly between invitation areas. In general, invitations areas proposed by thematic Sida departments contained more detailed descriptions of requested research. Applications within the invitation areas were first reviewed in the ordinary assessment process. In a second stage the funding departments were asked to select relevant projects from those proposed for support.

Table 9: Invitation areas 2006-2008, funding department and approved projects

Invitation areas	Funding department	Number of projects funded
Democracy and the rule of law	DESO/DESA	5
Civil society	DESO/DESA	8
Chemicals and development	SAREC	?
Migration	SAREC	?
Climate change	SAREC	?
Humanitarian assistance	HUM	?
Research on aid	SAREC	?

The statistical base and documented follow-up activities are inadequate within all the invitation areas. This has been an aggravating factor in assessing their impact. It has only been possible to distinguish those projects that have received funding within invitation areas funded by other departments than the research department. The others have been merged into ordinary project lists. Hence, it has not been possible to determine to what extent these invitation areas have been funded. In addition, there seems to have been no separate budgets for the invitation areas initiated by the research department. Even though applicants have been asked to indicate whether their project falls within an invitation area, Sida has not kept records of this in the official statistics. This has made it impossible to assess how the Swedish research community has responded to this type of calls.

There have been few follow-up activities linked to projects supported within the invitation, with only a few exceptions noted in the invitation area on civil society.

Reportedly, the reference groups did not treat applications within the invitation areas differently in any way. No particular instructions were given for the management of

the invitation areas in relation to other applications, according to interviewed reference group members. The impression among many was that impact in general has been low, particularly for those areas initiated by the research department, which contained no additional funding. In general there was a clear opinion on the necessity of allocating larger budgets to have impact. Some also proposed reformulations for the invitation areas to be more problem oriented. For instance, reference was made to how the Gates Foundation formulates their calls with a specific problem to be solved at the centre.

“The idea of invitation areas is generally good, but it must be boosted with adequate funding to be successful. I know that there were some additional funds around for some of the areas, but it was unclear to me which once and how much. I don’t think there were any instructions from Sida on how to treat these invitation areas. I understood that it was much a relevance thing to Sida”. (Reference group member, AS)

“From what I have seen researchers tend to squeeze existing research directions into such invitation areas. In most cases this strategy does not benefit the field.” (Reference group member, HF)

“Sida should work differently with this type of invitations. Instead they should present a problem to be solved, like the Gates Foundation does.” (Reference group member, HF)

In conclusion, specific invitation areas have the potential to both strengthen the Swedish resource base and provide valuable information to Sida, MFA and other stakeholders. However, such areas have to be accurately selected and managed. The weaknesses identified are linked to two areas: 1) planning and resources and 2) follow-up and communication. In relation to these, the following main factors are worth considering in a future handling of invitation areas:

- Identification of areas must be strategically done, based on a careful identification of knowledge gaps within ongoing activities (preferably at Sida), a weighting and ranking of their importance for activities carried out as well as their researchable potential – to what extent can research provide an answer or contribute to increased knowledge?
- Identified potential invitation areas must be reconciled with available human resources within the Swedish research community. What is the state of current research capacity in a selected area? Is there capacity to respond to an invitation area? In general, a weak capacity will generate weaker research. A strong capacity is rarely in need for an invitation area to generate high quality and relevant results.
- Sufficient funding over a longer period has to be provided. A long-term perspective must guide the selection of invitation areas. An announcement of invitation areas automatically creates an expectation in the scientific community that there are additional resources allocated.

- The distribution of support must be strategic. In some areas it may be wise to concentrate resources to one or two research centres. In other areas, for instance where multi-disciplinary approaches are needed, resources may be more evenly distributed.

- For Sida, the MFA and other stakeholders to gain from invitation areas, accurate functions and resources are needed. Both planning (described above) and follow-up (communication with researchers and mediation of results to relevant functions) are resource-consuming activities requiring certain competences. Such competence could be found within Sida, but the current resource situation does hardly allow using it for this purpose.

4.4.3 Planning grants

During three years, 2006, 2007 and 2009, grants were given also for planning purposes. Specific calls for planning applications were made these years, and approximately 15 per cent of all applications concerned planning grants these years. The planning grants were meant to cover some travel and other expenses invoked by the process of putting together a project application. A maximum amount allocated was 100 000 SEK. The format for applications was simplified compared to the format for normal project applications, and the process of assessment was less thorough.

When applications and approvals of planning grants are compared to applications and approvals of projects of other sorts, a tendency for reinforcing university departments and individual applicants that usually receive funding emerges. The shares of approval are somewhat higher for those university departments that often receive funding when planning grants are included in the calculations. A closer scrutiny of individuals receiving the planning grants also indicates that well-known and established researchers were over-represented among those receiving planning grants. The conclusion is that the distribution of planning grants resulted in a reinforcement of established researchers, rather than helping young and less experienced researchers to produce project applications.

A survey of recent planning applications and the proposals receiving support give at hand that the group of researchers participating in this part of the U-forsk programme is rather limited. Well-known names turn up repeatedly, and allocations are given to a very limited number of research departments and institutes – IHCAR at the Karolinska Institutet concerning public and global health; The School of Global studies at Gothenburg University together with departments for Sociology and Geography at Lund University concerning a certain set of social science studies; The Business School at Gothenburg University for economic studies; a rather limited set of researchers from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in environmental and agricultural studies; and the department for System Ecology at Stockholm University as the most active ones. There are more and other applicants, but the ones mentioned are overly represented, indicating limited renewal and possibly stagnation in the sector.

4.4.4 Research results and Sida's monitoring process

Concluding from interviews undertaken with former and current Sida staff, it is clear that there is no follow-up taking place once research projects have been finished and findings reported. Scientific reporting is undertaken in a somewhat haphazard way, with reports being written in varying formats, usually quite late and often not at all. When reports come to Sida, they are left unread and thereafter filed in the archive, where a number of different reports are lumped together under general headings.

When research advisors up to 2007 divided all incoming research applications between themselves and collectively read all of them, there was a possibility for knowledge produced to be circulated within Sida, and contacts with researchers to be established. Since the drastic reduction of staff involvement in the U-forsk programme since 2008 onwards, even this channel for informal and indirect spread of knowledge has been cut off. The result is that Sida no longer has any channels – direct or indirect – for picking up research results from the programme. The only remaining way would be if researchers themselves are involved in operational Sida activities or contact relevant Sida staff.

Research projects funded by the U-forsk programme are – as research projects in general – relatively often taking longer time than planned. This implies that final reports arrive with some delay. In addition, in Sida's archives scientific reports can be found only for some share of the finished projects. Hence, our descriptions of research results emerging from the programme can only be partial and biased. Nevertheless, a random selection among existing project reports indicate that several research results are, or may become, relevant to Sida's work. We will in the following refer a few projects, as examples of what could be picked up for serious consideration for Sida's own work.

One group of projects are relevant for Sida's support to, and through, civil society organisations. For instance, a study done by the political scientist Henrik Berglund at Stockholm University dwell on what factors that are determining progress in civil society organisations political campaigning activities. His study of Indian protests against some working methods by the Coca-Cola company point to the need of functional government institutions as a prerequisite for CSO campaigning progress. Such insights seem relevant also for wider democracy support. The economist Niklas Bengtsson from Uppsala University shows that support delivered through faith-based organisations has a tendency to be benefit people belonging to that belief tradition, contrary to Sida's regulations and even contrary to the intentions of the organisation. Both these findings seem to be directly relevant for operational deliberations.

Similar examples may be found in area after area. Studies in public health are providing practical advice relevant to health interventions in areas such as treatment of HIV-infected persons, treatment of HIV and Tuberculosis and prevention and treatment of other diseases. Anthropological studies provide information about how poor people search for healthcare and on how they use traditional medicine and related indigenous

knowledge. Migration studies provide knowledge about health effects on migrants as well as remaining family members from migration.

In the agricultural field, new methods for filtering away pollutants from “grey water”, that is mainly household waste water, open for accessing such water for crop irrigation. These findings emerge from a study conducted by researchers at the Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences (SLU). A number of other studies look into various dimensions of water management, pollutants and their effects on environments as well.

A couple of studies – one conducted by researchers at the Royal Institute of Technology, in collaboration with the AKTI institute in Tanzania; and one conducted by researchers at the Linneaus University – investigate and develop methods for the production of biogas from household and agricultural waste. Such biogas can then be used for cooking at household level or for vehicles, while rest products can be used as fertilizer. These latter studies seem to be highly relevant for projects supported by Sida’s market development as well as the agricultural units. There is currently a high demand for investment in agro-fuel production in a number of Swedish partner countries. Techniques such as these are therefore in high demand, especially since they by using waste products has the potential to somewhat temper the tension between the production of food and fuel on valuable farmland.

It is noteworthy that Sida, through its U-forsk programme has supported more than one such project in Tanzania, and in addition has failed to bring these researchers in contact with other actors in energy or market development sectors. To develop functional linkages between researchers, market actors, energy sector officials and other relevant stakeholders is part of developing functional national innovation systems. Sida has over some years also financed research on innovation systems as such. However, when it comes to bringing lessons learned into practice there seems to be missed opportunities, primarily in Tanzania.

Recent studies on productivity growth and firm turnover in Ethiopia, by a group of economists at the Business School at Gothenburg University, are highly relevant for development of the manufacturing sector and thus economic diversification in Ethiopia and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. This research does also look into gender relations and preconditions for female enterprising. Such studies are essential for understanding of the potential for job creation in African economies, and the potential for making economic growth more inclusive and hence more poverty reducing and sustainable. In other words, studies such as these are essential for the broader task of poverty reduction.

These are just a few examples where rather superficial observations based on the evaluators particular knowledge, have indicated areas of potential synergies between research findings and operative practices. Closer studies by people with other competencies would almost certainly render more cases.

As with all research, there is a need to bridge academic studies and the practice of development cooperation. Not all studies provide findings that can be practically used immediately. There is a potential risk that findings may be wrong, or not precise enough. Hence, there is need for additional studies to correct and fine-tune findings. And directly relevant findings need to be transformed into a format where they can be practically used in particular settings. This is what the concept “learning selection” is about – adapting, adjusting and fine tuning findings or inventions to the particular social, cultural and ecological conditions prevailing in the environment where they are to be used.

That bridging is cumbersome, complex and time consuming is, however, no argument for not trying. Given research investments by the U-forsk programme, which have led to many research findings that are relevant to practice, it would seem useful to allocate resources also to the bridging of research and practice. It would be a task for researchers involved in the programme as well as relevant Sida officers to contribute to such exchanges and interaction. But it would also be a task where specialised knowledge might be needed – a reason why research advisors at Sida have been required to hold PhD degrees themselves.

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

Why should Sweden support research on development conducted in Sweden when such research might be available elsewhere, perhaps with higher quality and almost as easily accessible for policy makers and practitioners through ICT resources and new media? Research has over the last decades become increasingly international in character with collaboration between researchers in different countries becoming standard procedure, and research conferences almost exclusively international. It is increasingly uncertain whether results from nationally financed research will benefit the financing country more than it will benefit other countries.

There are still several plausible reasons why development research in Sweden should be supported. One is the often used argument that Sweden needs a resource base of people trained in development issues for recruitments to Sida, the MFA, civil society organizations and other organizations involved in development cooperation. Researchers are in addition also needed for the implementation of capacity building programs within the realm of Swedish bilateral research cooperation with low-income countries. The primary vehicle to build such a resource base is still national research funding, which implies training of teachers in higher education.

An additional reason is that access to research findings and results is greatly enhanced when a society has people that are active in research themselves. To understand and interpret research findings requires knowledge of scientific methodologies. Methodological advances are constantly made; hence understanding is greatly enhanced for those that keep updated on methodological evolutions. Translation of research findings into policy and practice is also made easier by having active researchers that are familiar with the national setting. This is one of the conditions for effective bridging of research and policy (Young et al, 2009:245).

These two arguments combine into a more general one: Sweden needs research about conditions in, and issues relevant to, low-income countries because such countries are rapidly gaining more influence internationally. Hence, provision of such research is in the national self-interest of Sweden.

There is as well something to gain from development research for research in general. The broadening and networking of research communities beyond the OECD and emerging middle-income countries (such as the BRICS) has been much earlier, and gone much further in development research than in any other research field. When Sweden continues to open up for the world, influences from other parts of the world will be increasingly important. As Soete (2009) has pointed out, some of the harder research questions emerge from development contexts. Distinctions between developing and developed countries are increasingly difficult to uphold (and accordingly that

development research is becoming an increasingly vague concept), and research is less and less a national endeavor (with research findings increasingly being internationally accessible). This implies that new approaches are needed. For instance, Soete himself calls for a systematic exploration of the possibilities to integrate research for development into curricula and research activities of university departments and institutes in the North. Many other perspectives are represented in the debate on Swedish development research. But if Sweden would like to continue being an actor in international development it is inconceivable that there should be no research undertaken in Sweden on issues relevant for development.

The next argument for Swedish development relevant research stem from processes of increasing internationalisation. Development research is less than ever a uniform research field that applies to specific problems confined to a specifically defined context – the so-called developing country. Poverty remains a major problem in the world, but its faces have become much more varied and so also its causes. At the same time, the provision of regional and global public goods is becoming an increasing challenge for the international community. Global challenges such as for instance climate change, financial instability, terrorism, biodiversity loss or transmittable diseases have generated insights that research relating to issues of national development to larger extent must be supplemented by research on problems of global character (Government research Bills 2008 and 2012).

The current Swedish research policy has a strong focus on links between research and economic development and in particular research of relevance to the drivers of the economy e.g. the business sector. The formulation of strategic areas, such as mining and forestry, in the recent government bill on research is a clear indication. Research areas relating to global challenges have clearly been highlighted in this and previous policies. However, they have not been subject for direct strategic support to the same extent. Possible explanations may be unclear demarcations of the global challenges and that problems associated with them to large extent still affect geopolitical settings outside Sweden. Yet, the effects of these types of problems are increasingly becoming a reality also in our part of the world, effects that most certainly will impact on the existing paradigm of economic growth.

Global problems require global research approaches. Research conducted within the frame of international collaboration will stand a better chance to arrive at adequate, applicable and sustainable solutions. Swedish researchers have an important role to play in these collaborations as well as researchers from low-income countries. However, the latter often face problems to participate in international research collaboration, both in terms of recognition and resources for participation. Despite the recognised need for internationalization of research (not least within the field of development research and research on issues of global character), funding systems for research in many countries remain national in character, both in terms of scope and approaches to collaboration - Sweden is no exception.

The current formulation of the U-forsk programme contains serious shortcomings with regard to prerequisites for international collaboration. The fact that it is not possible to make joint applications is highly problematic. Earlier arguments about synergies between the U-forsk programme and the financing streams within bilateral research support programmes have weakened into extinction. Today, the financing restriction corresponds neither to basic criteria of internationalisation nor to requirements for synergy with other modalities in Sida's support to research. The poor conditions for research at universities in low-income countries have long been known at Sida, still the restriction has remained unchanged throughout the program's existence. This is to our understanding mainly due to formal administrative restrictions, not allowing for salaries to be paid outside Sweden. Our view is that this problem could not be a legitimate reason for not opening up the program for joint applications. Such opening would also be in line with the government's policy and strategy for research collaboration.

Turning to the issue of research quality, we were not able to find substantive indications that the research supported by the U-forsk programme should be of lower quality than research supported by other Swedish research funding agencies. What we did come across was, however, a number of strange prejudices that this would be the case. One such prejudice held that research assessed for its development relevance per se was of lower quality, or that research conducted with less technology intense methods in low income countries should be of lower quality. Another prejudice was that research focusing on Africa or other low-income countries per se is of lower quality. A concrete example that gives reason to doubt these veracities was showed in the transfer of health related research to the Swedish Research Council, where the same projects had been selected for funding by both agencies.

The general perception of people interviewed for this study is that the U-forsk programme in principle is a very important programme for Sweden. "Sweden needs the world more than the world needs Sweden", was one way of expressing this. There is a strongly felt need for research in Sweden on issues of relevance for international development. Beyond that, however, many interviewees expressed strong criticism against the way the U-forsk programme has been administered, and more widely the way it has evolved in recent time. The rapid and wide decrease in the number of applications to the programme indicates the pertinence of this critique.

That a division of labour between Sida and other research funders has appeared in practice was reported already in the 2006 evaluation of Swedish development research cooperation. Despite changes in funding processes, e.g. with funding for global health research being moved from Sida to the Swedish Research Council, this division of labour has continued over the 2006 – 2012 period. It implies that other research councils refer development relevant research to Sida – a practice that also has allowed prejudices to be maintained.

There is need for awareness building within the Swedish research community about the character and importance of research relevant for development. This should be

part of a continued process of internationalization of Swedish research. The move of the U-forsk programme to the Swedish Research Council creates ample possibilities for such awareness raising, implying that also the prestige and standing of such research may be raised. However, this will take concerted efforts where those that have been involved in the U-forsk programme over the years will have to play important parts.

A reformulation of the direction and framework along with the move to the Swedish Research Council imply possibilities that even larger amounts of funds could be allocated to the programme. Attaching research on global challenges as components in the programme could open up for increased collaboration with other research funding government agencies.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

The overall framework and direction of the program should to be reformulated, both in terms of span and precision. This may both lead to better adequacy of the research produced and more and better coordinated funding of the research. It is suggested that the framework of the programme comprises two question areas:

- 1) Questions of relevance to poverty reduction in low- and middle-income countries, in accordance with the OECD/DAC criteria and the overall objective of Swedish development co-operation .
- 2) Questions of relevance to the handling of global challenges.

The introduction of the second question area is believed to increase the prospects for collaboration with other Swedish research funding agencies. Joint calls could be formulated and funded within the programme that corresponds to the research agendas of the individual research councils.

For reasons of stability and continuity no short-term specific research areas or policy strategic priorities should guide the programme.

5.1.1 Quality and relevance

Stability over time is needed for credibility in the programme to be rebuilt. Without such credibility wider circles of researchers will perceive it as less meaningful to carry out research of relevance for development.

The overall directions and focus areas of the programme should constitute the main criteria for the assessment of relevance. Such criteria should be further specified into general guidelines for the assessment. There is however a risk that the use of too detailed relevance criteria would cause crowding out of good quality research.

Quality should be assessed prior to, and more fundamental than the assessment of development relevance. Relevance criteria should be applied in the selection of research projects to fund. Failing to live up to such relevance criteria should result in rejection.

International peer-reviews are valid mechanisms to enhance the knowledge areas of reference groups. If such reviews are to supplement the assessments in the reference groups, clear instructions on the handling and weighting of these reviews need to be worked out. To increase and even out the quality of the peer reviews, a system for compensation to the reviewers should be considered.

The multidimensional nature of many problems associated with development and poverty calls for interdisciplinary research. The programme should therefore to larger extent encourage such research approaches.

Clear instructions for the handling of conflict of interest needs to be worked out. Existing instructions at the Swedish Research Council may be applied.

5.1.2 Management by the Swedish Research Council

The transfer of the programme to the Research Council must be guided by clear instructions from the Government. These instructions should contain specific guidelines on the framework and direction of the program (tentatively the problem areas suggested in this review) and the administrative set-up (mainly the specific committee).

It is crucial that Sida is involved in the planning, implementation and operation of the programme. To secure participation, this must be stated in the instructions from the Government.

The set-up of a specific committee for development research stated in the Government Bill 2012 must involve sufficient representation from Sida to secure adequate appliance of relevance criteria and synergies to other activities of the research cooperation in line with the strategy for research in the development cooperation.

Regardless of which solution to the synergy issue that is chosen, the Swedish Research Council will have to build its capacity to assess and handle issues of development relevance, since this is a requirement within the U-forsk programme. The Swedish Research Council may opt for different forms for the overall management of the U-forsk programme, including separate reference groups, or the use of its current reference groups. When it comes to the assessment of relevance, this will, however, require some new modality.

If the Research Council chooses to add some mechanism for the scrutiny of development relevance, this could take on different forms. It might be a mechanism build within the Council itself and conducted by staff of the Council. Given that the Council has not been allocated any additional administrative resources for the U-forsk pro-

gramme for 2013, reallocations within the Council's existing budget and staff resources would have to be made. Alternatively, the mechanism could be a referral back to Sida for development relevance scrutiny, much along the lines of the collaboration between the Council and the Swedish Energy Authority. This would demand that continued resources be set aside within Sida. Regardless of which, it seems as if programme resources might be needed for this, at least during an initial phase, when no additional funds have been allocated.

5.1.3 Synergies and collaboration

Synergies between the U-forsk programme on the one hand, and bilateral and regional and global research cooperation activities should be upheld, following the prescriptions in the policy and strategy regulating the use of funds within the U-forsk programme.

For this, and for other reasons explained above, the U-forsk programme needs to be opened up for joint applications between Swedish researchers and researchers in low-income countries.

For synergies to be upheld, there is need to develop relevant channels for information sharing between the Swedish Research Council, managing the U-forsk programme, and Sida staff involved in the management of bilateral research capacity building programmes and regional and global research programmes. One objective of such information sharing would be to identify a Swedish research resource base available for those other programmes. Another objective would be to identify areas of emerging research collaboration between Sweden and low-income countries that may be further nurtured.

An opening up for joint applications raises the needs for an increased financial envelop to be attached to the programme.

5.1.4 Research communication

There are several research results and findings emerging from the U-forsk programme that should inform both practice and policy in the field of development cooperation. This study has shown that modalities in the programme that have been applied to bridge research and policy all have failed, together with efforts at internal learning within Sida from the programme. The few successful examples of joint learning that has taken place have come from researcher's own initiative.

It is unrealistic to believe that successful mechanisms for the bridging of research on the one hand, and policy and practice on the other, could be integrated as parts of the programme. Such mechanisms should rather be conceived as specific programmes, requiring specific methods, resources and competences. Sida should therefore think about this as a specific challenge, requiring specific initiatives.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Terms of reference

Case No.:
2012-000447

Date
2012-05-14

Terms of reference— Review of Sida's Program for Development research (Uforsk)

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Information about Sida

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) is a government agency. Sida's goal is to contribute to enabling poor people to improve their living conditions. Sida works independently within the framework established by the Swedish Government and Parliament. They decide on the amount of the financial contribution to the countries which Sweden (and thus, Sida) will cooperate with, and the focus and content of this cooperation. Currently Swedish development cooperation is 1 percent of the GDP.

The overall objective of Sweden's research support is to strengthen and develop scientific research of relevance to fight against poverty in developing countries. In order to achieve the overall objective of Sweden's development research policy, Sida's support embraces three areas:

- Research capacity building in developing countries and regions
- Research of relevance to developing countries
- Swedish research of relevance to developing countries

Further, the Strategy for Sida's support to research cooperation establishes in more detail three modalities of cooperation, namely:

- *Capacity building*: Support to national universities and to regional and global research institutions and organisations, so that partners are better able to plan, produce and use

research in the fight against poverty. Synergies between the bilateral, regional and global supports are important in this regard.

- *New Knowledge*: Support to promote the production of research relevant for low income countries, which is quality assured according to conventional academic principles.
- *Normative function*: Mostly multilateral organisations, which provide policy advice to member states and are able to expand the existing discourse in strategic areas of importance.

For additional information, please visit Sida's website, www.sida.se

1.2. Information about the Unit for Research Cooperation

Sida's Unit for Research Cooperation (FORSK) is part of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. FORSK has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy for Research Cooperation 2010-2014 and reports to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The unit is responsible for a strong and cohesive knowledge and capacity development for research issues in Swedish development cooperation. It has overall responsibility for Sida's support for international research at the global level and is also responsible for supporting Swedish research relevant to poverty reduction in developing countries.

For more information about Sida's Unit for Research Cooperation, please consult www.sidaresearch.se.

1.3. Description of Sida's Council for Development research, Uforsk

Sweden's active involvement in global development issues is contingent on the availability of Swedish research expertise for qualitative, relevant participation in joint endeavors at different levels of various kinds – bilaterally, regionally and internationally. Internationally competitive Swedish research expertise in the development field also represents an important resource for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and other relevant actors.

Support to Swedish research of relevance to developing countries is mainly given through Sida's Council for Development research, Uforsk. The program's overall goal is to support research of high quality and relevance of Swedish development cooperation in line with Sweden's Policy for Global Development (PGD) and Strategy for Sida's support to research cooperation 2010-2014.

More specifically, an open call is launched each year for research funding. The grants are available for research projects of relevance to developing countries with the aim to contribute to equitable and sustainable development. The call is open to researchers applying for grants through Swedish universities and other Swedish research institutions.

The applications received in the open call are processed in scientific reference groups covering the following areas:

- Humanities, Education and Culture (HUK)
- Natural Resources and Environment (NM)
- Natural Sciences and Technology (NT)
- Social Sciences – Economics (ES)
- Social sciences (AS)
- Health Sciences

The research may be aimed at immediate benefits as well as to the development of knowledge that is potentially significant for selected areas. A multidisciplinary approach is encouraged. Applications within the area of global health research are handled by Vetenskapsrådet since 2011.

Sida allocates approximately 10% of its research cooperation contribution to Uforsk. Approximately 40 new projects are funded every year and most projects are granted three years. The following figures indicate the total funds allocated to the Uforsk program throughout the last 7 years (not adjusted for inflation):

2006: SEK 132 524 000
 2007: SEK 139 584 000
 2008: SEK 129 364 000
 2009: SEK 137 056 000
 2010: SEK 81 484 000
 2011: SEK 110 070 000
 2012: SEK 129 963 000

1.4. Earlier reviews

Since Sida's Council for Development Research (Uforsk) commenced in 1975⁹, it has been reviewed and evaluated on several occasions by different initiators within the agency itself, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as independent contractors. The program was most recently scrutinized in 2006 when the Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research (SISTER) completed two evaluations; one commissioned by Sida's Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC, (Enclosure 2) and the other one by Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal

⁹ Sidas ulandsforskningsråd nu Sidas råd för utvecklingsforskning

Audit (Enclosure 3)¹⁰. Both evaluations assessed the scope, orientation and impact of the Uforsk program in relation to the main objectives stated in Sweden's Policy for Global Development.

The reviews in 2006 concluded that there was a need for clearer objectives in order to improve performance monitoring of the program, and they recommended that larger and longer projects should be given to strong research environments and more thematic calls were proposed. Regarding the monitoring and follow-up of research grants the 2006 reviews stated it appeared that the administrative and financial monitoring was significantly more comprehensive and systematic compared to the qualitative monitoring of the projects scientific results and development relevance.

2. SCOPE OF ASSIGNMENT

2.1. General information

The conditions, both internal and external to Sida, for the Swedish development assistance are in constant change. Since the evaluations in 2006, Sida has for example gone through two major reorganisations, accentuated its management for results with adequate internal control and has started implementing the Swedish Policy and Sida's Strategy for Swedish research cooperation 2010-2014 decided by the Swedish government in 2009. In the Strategy, one objective states that Sida shall support Swedish research of relevance to developing countries.

In 2006, the total time allocated to Uforsk at the responsible department (SAREC) was the equivalent of 4 full time positions. There was one desk officer working full time with the program, one program administrator and another 25 research advisors participated in the process. As a consequence of the reorganisations of Sida in 2008 and 2011, there is today one program administrator and 5 participating research advisors handling the program.

Due to these changes Sida believes that Uforsk is in need of an assessment of the quality of the program, its feasibility, effectiveness and efficiency to reach the goal of strengthening Swedish research of relevance to developing countries. It is also important to consider and elaborate on other possible routes to reach this goal.

¹⁰ The main functions of these departments are after the reorganization of Sida placed in the Unit for Research Cooperation and Sida's Internal Audit respectively.

Furthermore, there is a need for an overview of the research results that has come out of the projects supported by Uforsk, and an assessment of the results monitoring process.

It is desirable that the review uses the 2006 reviews as point of departure or baseline and discusses the changes suggested by the 2006 evaluators and the possible effects those changes and changes caused by Sida's reorganisations brought to the program throughout the subsequent years.

2.2. Purpose and scope of the review

The purpose of the review is to provide Sida with a comprehensive analysis and assessment of Uforsk to help Sida obtain a deeper knowledge of the impact that Sida's organisational change has affected the program as well as the measures that have been taken to maintain its quality (delegating the research health program to VR). The assessment of Uforsk will be key to Sida's further discussion about its current state and future management.

The review will assess the extent to which Uforsk has promoted Swedish research of relevance to developing countries according to the objectives in the Sida's strategy for research cooperation 2010-2014 and the objectives of Uforsk prior to 2010. The review is expected to focus on the ability of Sida as a research funder to develop appropriate forms of assistance to meet its stated goals.

The review will assess the relevance, quality of processes (for calls, selection etc), efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of Uforsk in relation to Sida's strategy for research cooperation 2010-2014 and give recommendations on future directions to Sida. The time frame to be covered is from 2006 and onward.

2.3. The assignment

The detailed questions outlined below should be seen as a way to encircle the overall assessment.

2.3.1. Effects and results

The involvement and interest of Swedish researchers' in Sida's research cooperation are important to the government of Sweden. The conditions to attract their interest and participation should be highlighted.

- Identification and analysis of program impact. Statistics and trends over time with the 2006 evaluations as baseline. Who gets funding? Subject, university, male / female, young / senior.
- Size of grants relevant? Adequate number of grants with relation to number of applicants? Is the extent of Sida support reasonable in order to reach the objectives?
- What effects did the support for research networks have?

- What effects did thematic priorities have? It was perceived not successful and difficult to handle at Sida; what would have been needed to make it work? Would it have been worthwhile to make those adjustments?
- The review should assess the impact of Uforsk grants on the production of Swedish research of relevance to developing countries and on Sida's research cooperation as a whole (i. e. Swedish research increasingly collaborate with researchers in developing countries, Swedish researchers increasingly participate in co-operation with Sida's partner countries)
- The review shall give an overview of research results produced with Uforsk grants and assess Sida's results monitoring process.

2.3.2. Management processes

The review will assess how Sida's Council for Development research has managed the annual open calls and the evaluation processes with relation to quality standards and practices used by other research councils.

- Does the document "Information till sökande" provides a good idea of the call and its application and selection process? Do applicants receive reasonable feedback?
- Is the reference groups' amount of work fair in relation to volume and quantity of work? Can the work be simplified without loss of quality?
- Define pros and cons of Sida having its own reference groups compared with transferring the call, for example, to Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet)? Illustrate the situation of health research that has been moved to the Vetenskapsrådet. What implication did it have for the health research area in relation to development relevance, scientific quality, number of applicant / funding, size of the grant? What implications does it have for Sida losing "ownership" of the call in terms of reduced knowledge about current development research and reduced contact with the Swedish resource base?
- Assess the value of research advisor participating in the reference group work processes; discuss the balance between pros and cons and how development relevance could best be judged. Assess the value of the participation of representatives from Sida's different departments and how their input could best be given?
- Are the open call, assessment and monitoring processes of development relevance adequate?
- Do the reference groups assist in increasing the awareness of development issues within the scientific community?
- Are the open call, assessment and monitoring processes of the scientific quality adequate?
- Is the time that the Unit allocates to Uforsk reasonable in relation to the task? Illustrate the impact of the changes that have occurred since 2006.

2.3.3. Alternative forms

Based on the results of the review different future scenarios and there possible effects should be discussed.

- Is the Sida's Councils for Development Research an appropriate "method" to strengthen the development of relevant research in Sweden?
- What would be a reasonable design of the program in relation to the capacity of Sida?
- What would be a reasonable design of the Council to achieve the goal of the Sida's Strategy for Research Cooperation?
- What would be a reasonable results monitoring process to feedback research results into the development context?

2.3.4. Research Communication / performance use

- How can research findings be used? Give suggestions for an effective process for compilation of research results, transfer of knowledge to and within Sida and to a wider audience of practitioners?

2.4. Budget

- The total budget is SEK 400,000. The possible costs of a publication of the final report are not included.

2.5. Schedule

The assignment will be initiated 1 June 2012 and completed no later than 15 September 2012. An Inception report should be presented to Sida two weeks after acceptance of the assignment. A meeting with Sida will take place to further discuss in detail the objects and methods for the review. If distances are long the meeting can be held via video-link.

The review shall be conducted and results made available in a timely manner in relation to the purpose of the review. Un-envisaged changes to timeframe and budget must be explained in the report. Any discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation and products of the review must be explained.

A draft of the final report should be available to Sida 1 September 2012 and the final report no later than two weeks after comments on the draft have been received from Sida.

2.6. Profile of the person responsible for the implementation of the service

The consultants carrying out the assignment must

- Have PhD degree
- Be an active researcher (documented with current publications in CV),

- Have a minimum of 10 years' experience as researcher
- Good knowledge about the Swedish research funding system
- Experience from research funding work
- Previous experience in conducting similar review studies
- Have experience of scientific research in developing countries
- Have very good knowledge in spoken and written Swedish and English.

The tender must include:

- a) A description in the form of a Curriculum Vita for the person who is to be responsible for the performance of the project. The CV must contain a full description of the person's theoretical qualifications and professional work experience. The CV must be signed by the person proposed.
- b) Two written specifications of previously performed similar projects by the proposed person. The specifications must be signed by the principal for whom the person performed the similar assignment³. The specifications must contain information according to the annexed form "Reference for Project Performed by an Individual", Appendix 2.1, and relate to projects performed and concluded within the past three years.

2.7. Reporting and documentation

An Inception Report providing information about the review executor, the perceived task, the methodology, a budget proposal and a detailed time schedule shall be presented as soon as possible but no later than two weeks after the assignment has been received.

When the review has been concluded, the major findings, conclusions and recommendations shall be compiled in a report in line with the scope of this review. A draft of the final report shall be submitted no later than 1 September 2012 followed by a revised and final version two weeks upon receiving Sida's comments. The final report shall be consistent with Sida's Evaluation Guidelines (Appendix E) and the DAC Quality Standard for Development Evaluation (Appendix G). The report shall be written in English, not exceeding 40 pages excluding annexes and include an executive summary. Finally, the report shall be written in Microsoft Word and should be presented in a way that enables publication without further editing.

Appendix II: Basic interview guide

Intervjuguide: referensgruppsledamöter/forskar/personal på Sida och VR

Namn:

Ref grp:

Tid i ref grp:

Period:

Syfte/mål

- Anser du att syftet/målet för programmet är ändamålsenligt, fyller programmet den funktion som avses i Sidas mål- och syftesbeskrivning? Vilka är styrkorna/svagheter i relation till mål/syfte?
- Vilken betydelse/genomslag anser du programmet har för utvecklingen av forskning om fattigdomsrelaterade problem i låginkomstländer – i Sverige och internationellt?
- I vilken utsträckning anser du att den forskning som stöds genom programmet används/vidareutvecklas i låginkomstländer.
- I relation till ovanstående har du noterat några förändringar över tid under din tid som ledamot.

Kvalitet

- Vad anser du vara viktiga kvalitetskriterier i en forskningsansökan?
- Hur ser du generellt på kvaliteten på ansökningar till programmet inom din referensgrupp? Styrkor och svagheter generellt?
- Vad anser du om kvalitetsnivån på de forskningsansökningar som beviljas stöd i förhållande till andra forskningsråd?
- Hur tycker du att kvaliteten på ansökningar utvecklats under din tid som ledamot?

Relevans

- Vad anser du vara viktiga relevanskriterier i en forskningsansökan till programmet? (generella, Sidas, andra?)
- Hur ser du på relationen kvalitet – relevans?
- Hur tycker du att relevansfrågan behandlas inom din referensgrupp? Hur behandlas relationen mellan kvalitet och relevans i bedömningarna?

- Har du noterat några förändringar i synen på relevansbedömningen under din tid som ledamot?

Organisering

- Hur ser du på din roll som ledamot i referensgruppen? Vilken funktion anser du att du har? Vilka ev problem ser du i uppfyllandet av denna funktion?
- Anser du att sammansättningen av inriktning/kompetens inom din referensgrupp är tillräcklig i förhållande till bredden på ansökningar som bedöms?
- Hur ser du på organiseringen av bedömningsförfarandet avseende system för betygssättning, antal ansökningar att bedöma och referensgruppens möte?
- Hur ser du på jävsproblematiken bedömningsförfarandet?
- I vilken utsträckning anser du att Sida använder ett peer-reviewförfarande för att stärka bedömningsunderlaget. I vilken utsträckning anser du att peer-review används som del i referensgruppens bedömningsutfall.
- Vilken roll/funktion anser du att Sidas representanter (forskningssekreterare) har i referensgruppen arbete?
- Har du noterat några förändringar över tid med avseende på ovanstående under din tid som ledamot?

Samarbete/synergier

- I vilken utsträckning anser du att programmet bidrar till att utveckla samarbete mellan svenska forskare och forskare i låginkomstländer?
- Hur ser detta samarbete/relation i så fall ut?
- Vilka ev hinder finns för utvecklingen av samarbete inom programmet?
- I vilken utsträckning anser du att programmet kopplar till andra verksamhetsområden för Sidas forskningsstöd (bilateralt, regionalt, internationellt)? På vilka sätt?
- Har du noterat några förändringar över tid med avseende på ovanstående under din tid som ledamot?

Utfall/resultat

- Anser du att beviljningsgraden för programmet är rimlig i förhållande till storleken på programmet.

- Vilka får anslag? - forskningsområden, discipliner/ämnesområden, metodologi, lärosäten, institutioner, kön, ålder (junior/senior)? Har du noterat några förändringar över tid under din tid som ledamot?
- Vilket genomslag har de tematiska prioriteringarna haft för utfallet av bedömningarna i din referensgrupp? Hur har de behandlats i referensgruppen.
- I vilken utsträckning anser du att Sida använder forskningsresultat från programmet i sin verksamhet?
- Har du noterat några förändringar över tid med avseende på ovanstående under din tid som ledamot?

Framtida organisering

- Givet de erfarenheter (inom ovan områden och andra) du har som ledamot och forskare vilka förändringar (om några) anser du behöver göras för att utveckla programmet - främst med avseende på riktning/syfte/mål och organisering?



Review of Sida's Programme for Development Research

This is a review of Sida's programme for development research (U-forsk) that over long time has provided support to Swedish research of relevance for development and poverty reduction. The questions at issue for the review stem from a need to understand the significance and role of the programme in relation to changes that have taken place during the period 2006 to 2012. To provide a basis for the further handling of the programme the reviewers have covered a broad spectrum of areas such as overall significance, quality, relevance and synergies to more specific and practical issues relating to the administration of the programme.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

