Smart travels and meetings

As a modern agency, Sida promotes innovative ideas and ways of working to contribute to a global environmentally sustainable development. Sida has a particular responsibility to set a good example through its own operations by managing resources and working to reduce negative impact on the environment and climate. To encourage smarter travels and meetings is one way to reduce such negative impacts while also contributing to more effective forms of meetings.

Photo: Getty Images

Reducing global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) from air travels is crucial in achieving the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the earth's temperature rise to below two degrees. To achieve this goal, global GHG emissions need to be reduced to as little as two tons per person and year until 2050. IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, states that drastic and rapid measures must be taken to reduce GHG emissions to the atmosphere.

As a result of Sida's global operations, air travel accounts for the greatest direct negative environmental impact from Sida's activities where aviation stands for a large share of GHG emissions per annual workforce. This also applies to many of Sida's partner organisations.

This paper provides examples of issues that can be considered in the dialogue with Sida's partner organisations to manage and minimize their negative environmental impact from travels and meetings. The paper can be used as a support in assessments of contributions and it is a complement to Sida's general guidelines for integrating the environment and climate change perspective.

SIDA'S COMMITMENT TO REDUCE NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

It is as financier, analyst and dialogue partner Sida has the greatest environmental impact, both positive and negative. These impacts emerge indirectly through the activities and actions of various partners, such as their programmatic focus but also from how partners plan their travels and meetings. It is therefore important to manage both the indirect and the direct environmental impacts in a systematic and responsible way.

In Sida's environmental policy (2017), Sida commits to protect the environment and to proactively promote a
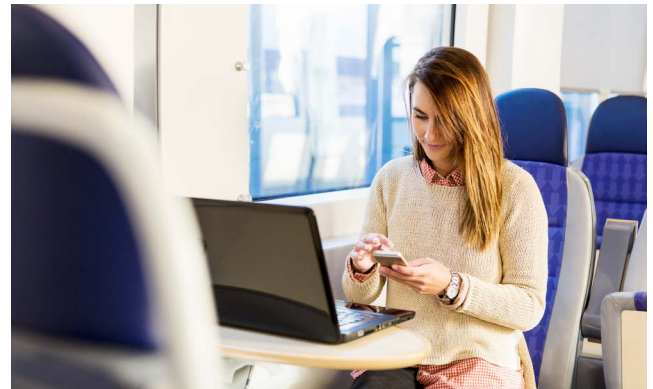
transformation to an environmentally sustainable development by integrating environmental aspects in all operations and sectors. This includes that Sida's direct negative environmental impacts shall decrease continuously, with sustained efforts for a greener office and a specific focus on reducing emissions of greenhouse gases from travelling. One key environmental target for Sida's work on a green office is *"By 2020 CO_2 emissions from travelling per full time staff/year are reduced by 15 % through smarter travelling and continuously increased use of other forms of meetings"*.

This ambitions shall be undertaken by *"systematically taking environmental aspects, including climate risks, into account and integrating them into planning, implementation and monitoring of strategies and contributions"*. In the dialogue, *"high-lighting environmental sustainability"* is acknowledged as *"an important entry-point with partners at all levels, in Sida's role as an expert agency, and in external communication"*.

SMARTER TRAVELLING AND USING ALTERNATIVE MEETING FORMS

Increased awareness and planning within Sida and its partners are necessary to achieve reduced emissions from travels as well as increase the use of alternative forms of meetings.

Sida shall in the dialogue with partners emphasize the importance of assessing and analyzing how the organisation's activities affect the environment. The approach of the organisation shall be formulated in an environmental policy, a separate travel and meeting policy or likewise. It is also of importance that Sida sets a good example and encourages virtual meetings whenever possible.

Travels are sometimes necessary to create an understanding of a context, establish personal contacts or for
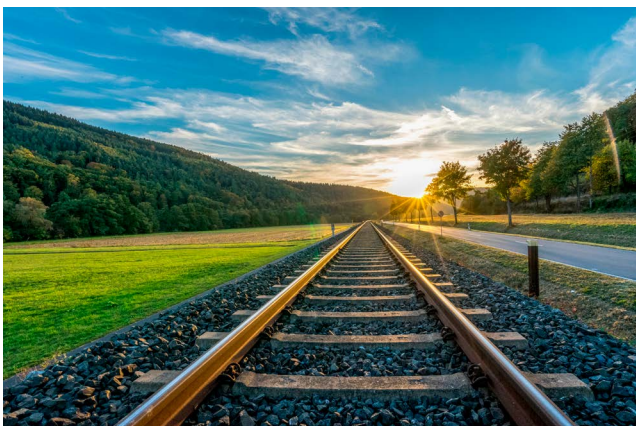
quality assurance, but it is many cases possible, as well as time and resource efficient, to replace travel demanding meeting with alternative meeting forms, which can have many various advantages:

➤ Effective use of financial resources – replacing travels with virtual meetings is likely to result in major financial savings as well as time savings and less stress for employees.

➤ Possibility of closer contact than what otherwise would be financially and practically possible.

➤ Virtual meetings can facilitate regional development and collaboration as the technology enables more organisations and citizens to participate in and influence processes.

➤ Virtual meetings have the possibility to strengthen the competence of organisations and contribute to increased representation/number of participants in meetings.

➤ Virtual meetings may contribute to increased equality as it allows women and men, regardless of their family situation, to participate in a meeting. Virtual meetings may also contribute to a more even representation of women and men at meetings.

STEP 1. THE APPROACH AND AWARENESS OF THE ORGANISATION

• Has the organisation conducted an environmental assessment of the activities' direct and indirect environmental impact (including impact on the climate)?

• Does the organisation have an environmental policy and what does it contain regarding travels and climate impact? Alternatively, has the organisation a travel and/or meeting policy/guideline or equivalent, and what does it contain?

• Does the organisation use innovative solutions for learning and meetings? For example, do they have a digitalization strategy and in what way does it relate to meetings and travels?

• Has the organisation formulated targets for reduced environmental impact (such as GHG emissions)?

• What knowledge, capacity and resources exist within the organisation to work with a digital transformation to, for example, reduce the number of travels? How does the organisation mange issues of IT security etc.?

• Does the organisation have the technical solutions needed (e.g. video-conference equipment, smart phones, reliable internet access etc.) to replace travels with virtual meetings?

• If technical solutions are poor, could a part of the travel budget be replaced with the procurement of necessary equipment?

STEP 2. TRAVELS WITHIN THE PROGRAM/PROJECT

• How many travels are planned during the contract period? Is the purpose of the travels well motivated and clear? Is the mode of transportation specified? Is there any difference between short and long-distance trips?

• How much GHG emissions are the planned travels expected to result in?

• Has the program/project been designed to avoid, or reduce and manage GHG emissions? For example, are local experts used instead of international ones? Can pre-recorded videos or virtual presentations replace influential high-profile speakers?

• In what way has policies/guidelines for the environment, meetings/travel, procurement etc. been implemented in the planning and design of the program/project?

• If the organisation practices any carbon offsetting, this should be clearly stated in a policy as well as in what way they compensate and how it is financed etc. Further information on carbon offsetting is available in the box below.

Sida and carbon offsetting

Currently Sida does not use any type of carbon offsetting for the travels carried out by the agencies' employees.

If a partner of Sida chooses to use a carbon offset scheme within the framework of Sida-funded programs, first and foremost, powerful measures should be taken to reduce the number of travels within the organisation. The organisation shall also have an explicit target to constantly improving measures on reducing their carbon footprint from travels.

Thereafter the following basic principles should be fulfilled in order for carbon offsetting to contribute to environmental benefits:

1) The carbon offsetting projects must be of good quality and have a high so-called environmental integrity.

2) Emissions reductions should be additional, not overestimated and projects must have a lasting and long-term climate effect.

3) The compensation should also be verified and certified by an independent third-party. One example is the Gold Standard.

STEP 3. IF A PROGRAM/PROJECT COMPRISES A LARGER AMOUNT OF TRAVELS

• What part of the program/project holds the greatest potential for reducing emissions from travels without reducing the desired outcomes of the contribution?

- Can the number of international conferences attended by the organisation be reduced? Can the number of representatives of the organisation at each conference be trimmed?
- Could some of the planned travels be replaced by virtual meetings? If several participants from an organisation are planning to travel to the same meeting, can some participate in the meeting virtually?
- Is there a possibility for planned conferences and meetings to be held in a place that is more logistically accessible? Is it possible to attend conferences/meetings virtually etc.?
- Can annual conferences instead be held for example every second year?
- Can conferences with synergies be scheduled back-to-back with each other or coordinated with other activities?
- Are there other modes of transportation, than air travel available? Is it possible to choose more energy-efficient vehicles for shorter travels?
- What is the incentive behind the conference? Who should/can Sida team up with in order to adress these potentially sensitive issues?

STEP 4: TAKE MEASURES

If a program/project is assessed to have a relatively large amount of travel and if emission reducing measures are missing, the following should be considered:

- An environmental assessment shall always be conducted as a part of the appraisal. Request the organisation to conduct a simplified environmental analysis – see Sida's Guidelines for Simplified Environmental Assessment in Green tool Box – it is important that the direct environmental impacts from travels are included in the assessment.
- Request the organisation to describe its environmental policy as well as meeting and/or travel policy. How is the policy applied in the program/project?
- Engage in a dialogue with the organisation about how innovations can contribute to increased efficiency, knowledge exchange and diversity within the program/project and in addition contribute to increased environmental benefits.
- If necessary, include support for capacity development on environmental issues in the budget.
- Include indicators that facilitate the follow-up on travels, for example:
  – Number of travels per employee per year,
  – Amount of GHG emissions from travels per employee per year,
  – Number of travel days per employee per year,
  – Travel expenses per employee per year,
  – Number of virtual meetings per employee per year, divided into telephone, web and video meetings.

- If applicable, include a wording in the agreement, for example;
  – During the program period, the partner organisation will develop internal routines to deal with environmental issues including the impact of travels.
  – The partner organisation will develop a travel and meeting policy that aims, among other things, to reduce the organisation's negative impact on the climate.
  – The partner organisation will report on the number of travels and its climate impact to Sida in its annual reporting.
  – The partner organisation shall develop procedures for environmental assessments in the forwarding of funds.

If you need assistance, please contact Sida's environmental adviser at your department or Sida's Environmental Helpdesk.

Sida's guidelines, polices and support

Sida's Travel and meeting policy at Inside

Sida's Green Tool Box

Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate

Tools and Checklist

There are various tools for calculating GHG emissions from travels.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a United Nations agency established to manage the International Civil Aviation Convention. ICAO has developed a tool to calculate greenhouse gas emissions when traveling. Also available as an app to download.

However, ICAO's calculator does not include the so-called high-altitude effect, which is the additional impact on the climate that emerges as aircraft fly on high altitude. To include the high-altitude effect, the sum can be multiplied by a factor of 1.9, which is in line with the most established scientific estimate.

Travelandclimate.org is a digital platform that can calculate the climate consequences of different trips and that compares emissions between modes of transports. The calculator includes the high-altitude effect.

UN Checklist – Greening the Blue for Successful Virtual/Remote Meetings in the UN

Sida