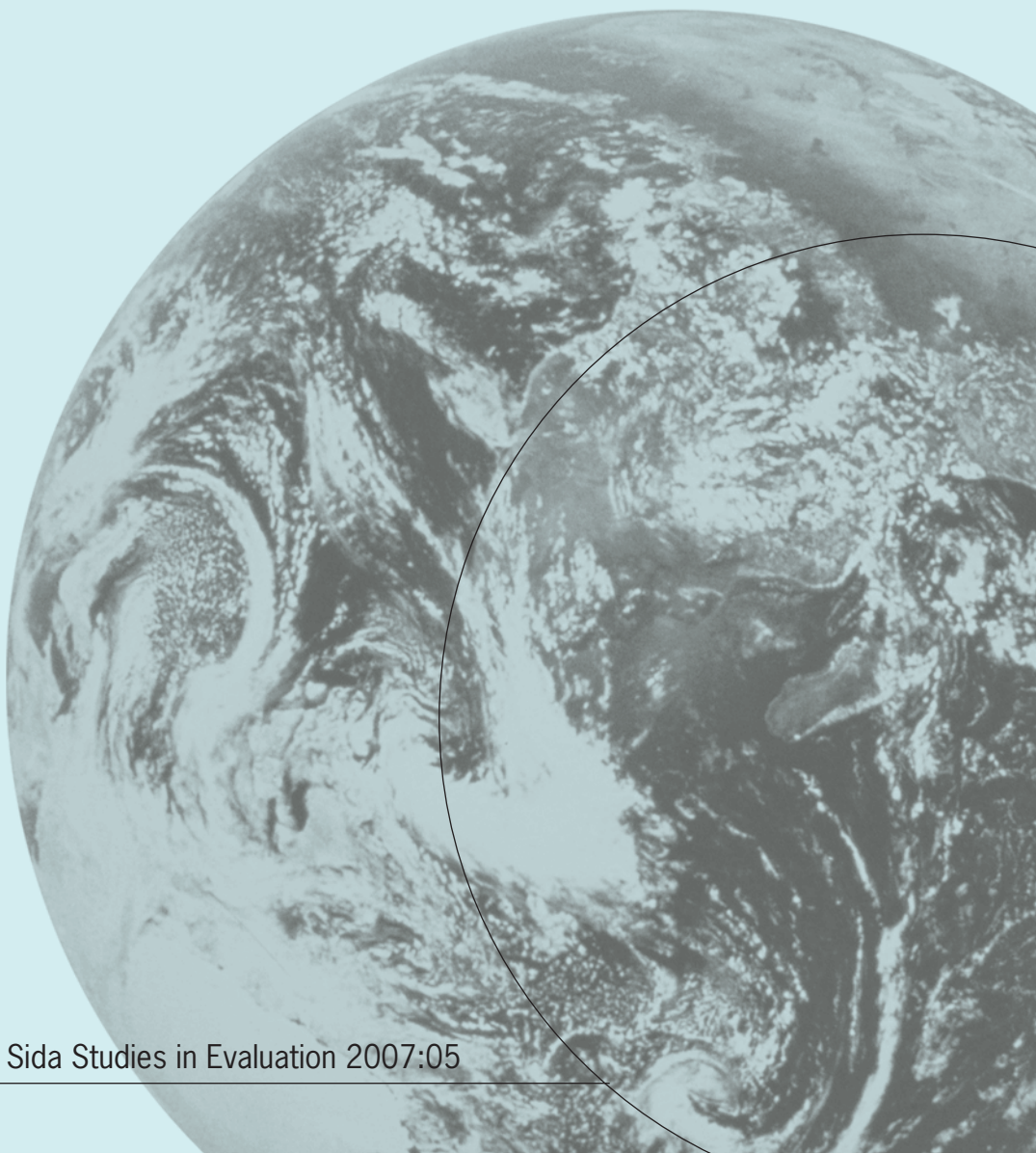


Mainstreaming at Sida

A Synthesis Report

Fredrik Ugglå



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Foreword



During recent years, Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV) has commissioned three evaluations on the implementation of Sida's policies on gender, HIV/AIDS and environment. All three policies share a specific mode of implementation: mainstreaming. Mainstreaming implies firstly that a policy is considered in all projects and programmes, and secondly that implementation is the responsibility of all staff within the organisation. Hence mainstreaming as a mode of implementation is demanding as it requires competence, capacity and commitment from all staff in the organisation.

This synthesis report draws on the lessons learnt from the three policy evaluations. Its purpose is to investigate the extent to which the policies on gender, HIV/AIDS and environment have been implemented, to explore why they have or have not been effectively implemented, as well as to present recommendations on how implementation might be enhanced.

The findings from all three mainstreaming issues are consistent in that there are a number of internal organisational features at Sida that hamper effective policy mainstreaming. These include an overload of different policies, unclear guidelines and goals, and an absence of systems for follow-up and learning.

Looking to the future and the enhanced efforts to integrate a rights perspective and perspectives of the poor alongside several mainstreaming issues, many of the problems identified in this report risk being exacerbated. However, by identifying obstacles to effective mainstreaming, the synthesis report points out important general recommendations, not least with regard to the need for policy coherence and clarity, as well as enhanced follow-up and learning.

Eva Lithman

Director

Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit

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Summary

The following report brings together findings from three evaluations of Sida's policies. These policies spell out the organisation's strategy with regard to gender, HIV/AIDS and the environment, respectively. What they have in common is that they specify what can be referred to as a "mainstreaming strategy", i.e., that these themes shall be considered in all aspects of the organisation's work, and the way it is to be done.

Such an approach is demanding, as it requires that staff and partners possess the necessary competence, capacity and commitment to make it effective. The purpose of the present study is to synthesise findings with regard to the degree to which these three policies have been implemented, the reasons for such implementation or its absence, and the recommendations how to enhance it.

With regard to implementation, the three evaluations reach strikingly similar conclusions: Sida has not managed to effectively implement any of the policies. Rather, treatments of these themes appear to be erratic, frequently disregarded, and often subject to the interest and commitment of individual staff members.

Similarly, the evaluations single out similar explanations for this. In particular, they indicate deficits and shortcomings related to Sida's internal organisation as obstacles to effective implementation. These include: An overload of different policies and guidelines, an absence of clear guidelines and goals, lack of systems for follow-up and learning, and deficits in staff competence to perform the necessary analyses. In comparison, shortcomings related to the policies themselves, to Sida's partners or the environment in which the organisation is active are mentioned with less frequency.

Such findings correspond to what has been found regarding the implementation of similar policies in other organisations active in the same field. Even so, however, none of the three evaluations advocate the abandonment of the mainstreaming approach. Rather, they provide recommendations on how it can be enhanced. Such suggestions include:

- Clarification of goals and responsibilities.
- Specification of synergies and relations between different policy areas.
- Enhancement of systems for follow-up and learning.
- Allocation of staff resources to match policy priorities.

In sum, the conclusions of the three evaluations seem to demand that Sida improves its action with regard to these policies. To a large extent, such improvement needs to focus on Sida's internal organisation and procedures. As the evaluations note, there are no viable alternatives to mainstreaming with regard to issues as important as these. Rather, Sida must attempt to find ways to make such an approach work better.

Introduction

Mainstreaming is a strategy for policy implementation. Although the exact definition of the term can be debated, its contents are fairly clear: That the issue at hand shall be considered in all projects and lines of work in an organisation. Hence, mainstreaming is the opposite of the alternative strategy of having specialised groups or units taking entire responsibility for a theme or issue. Mainstreaming, on the contrary, demands that the entirety of an organisation's staff be involved in the implementation of a policy.

It is often claimed that this concept was first developed with regard to the theme of gender equality, and that the summit meetings at Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) pioneered use of the term as a policy implementation strategy. Today, mainstreaming is not limited to gender, however. Other issues – such as environmental sustainability – have also vied for similar attention.

For the Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority (Sida) a number of themes today have a standing that should lead to their inclusion in all areas of the organisations work. They include the overall goal of poverty reduction, but also themes that are seen as central components of such efforts such as respect for human rights, economic growth, conflict management, etc.¹

On Sida's internal webpage, four policies (environment, private-sector development, gender and conflict) are lumped together along with the note that they "have the entirety of Sida as their target audience. They shall be known and followed by all staff."²

Although they may differ with regard to the exact formulations and instruments put in place to implement them, such policies share a common element: They are very demanding of the organisation and its partners as they stipulate that implementation be performed by the entire organisation. Hence, a number of questions could be posed: Has Sida lived up to its goals in these areas? Do administrative procedures at the organisation help or hinder such integration? How can the values embedded in such policies be transferred to partners?

¹ Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority. 2005. *Sida at Work*. Stockholm. P. 16.

² There is some confusion as to what areas are to be considered in all components of Sida's work. While the requirement is clearly in place for a number of areas (e.g. gender, environment, conflict, rights perspective), the inclusion of other areas is more controversial. An example of such a pseudo-mainstreaming policy is HIV/AIDS. The 2005 version of *Sida at Work* only states that this theme must be a "point of departure in preparation processes for countries with a high incidence of the pandemic and that this aspect has not been treated as a matter among others" (p. 31), without further discussion of what this may entail.

Over the last five years, Sida's secretariat for evaluation and internal audit has performed three major evaluations of themes that have a mainstreaming status at Sida (gender, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability). Even as their exact focuses have differed the evaluations have dwelled on similar problems, and reached similar conclusions.

The present paper attempts to summarise and draw conclusions from such similarities. As all three evaluations note there is considerable scope for enhancement of Sida's work. Hopefully, by compiling the information contained in these three evaluations, it is possible to contribute to a discussion of how Sida may improve its work with these fundamentally important questions.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: An initial part discusses how mainstreaming relates to what is known of bureaucratic behaviour in general, and spells out a number of possible obstacles and problems to such an approach. Thereafter follows a presentation of the three evaluations, preceding the main part of the report. This opens with a summary of what the evaluations found with regard to the implementation of the three policies in Sida. Subsequently, the reasons for the degree of implementation are discussed at length. In keeping with the initial discussion, such problems are divided into policy-related ones, the ones connected with Sida's internal organisation and procedures, and external ones.

The report juxtaposes these findings with what has emerged from evaluations of similar policies in other aid organisations. Finally, some of the recommendations made in the three evaluations are compiled.

Mainstreaming and Theories of Bureaucratic Behaviour

From a perspective of what is known about bureaucratic behaviour, mainstreaming poses a number of special challenges. In particular these are connected to the problem of how to effectively delegate and decentralise responsibility in an organisation. The following section draws on such reasoning to discuss what may be problems and obstacles for the effective implementation of a mainstreaming policy. These categories of potential problems will subsequently be used as the report's reference frame.

The theoretical underpinning for the mainstreaming of certain policy issues is that they are of such importance to achieving sustainable development that they cannot be overlooked. Accordingly, all of Sida's contributions and activities need to consider such thematic areas, even if just to dismiss their importance for the specific contribution at hand.

This also means that responsibility for integration of the policy in question is spread throughout the entire organisation. As is noted for instance in Sida's policy for the environment:

“In principle, the responsibility for the inclusion of an environmental perspective in programmes of development cooperation is *decentralised* at Sida. All heads of department/divisions, programme officers and others are responsible for environmental issues within their own particular areas of responsibility and for ensuring that there is requisite expertise in the departments, field offices and embassies.”³

Similarly, Sida's current gender policy applies the same broad perspective as it notes that:

“Sida's role as a development cooperation partner includes promoting and creating conditions for gender equality in its interventions, actions and dialogue. [...] Gender mainstreaming implies that gender equality is analysed and understood before any decisions are made and plans outlined in order to influence and affect Sida's interventions and work.”⁴

³ Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority. 2004. Sida's Environmental Management System. Stockholm. P. 8. Emphasis in original.

⁴ Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority. 2005. Promoting Gender Equality in Development Cooperation. Stockholm. P. 7.

This method of work brings with it important consequences. In particular, it imposes a number of requirements on Sida's staff. Not only must they be able to take on responsibility for the issue at hand, they must also be willing to do so.

This differs from an alternative implementing strategy, which would consist in the delegation of authority for a particular theme to a specialist unit exclusively devoted to the particular issue in question. In such cases, the theme can be confined to a group of people with special training, and interest in it, and which have this as their sole responsibility. Conversely, mainstreaming relies on passing responsibility to persons which may or may not have the competence and interest in it, and who will always have other duties and tasks as their primary ones.

These differences can be described graphically as chains of delegation between an organisation's direction and the entities charged with implementing decisions. Figure 1 thus represents the "specialist unit model" in which responsibility is delegated to a particular unit with exclusive responsibility for the issue at hand.

Figure 1: Specialist unit model:

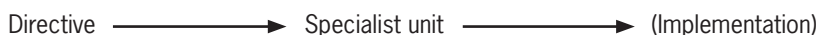


Figure 2 describes the mainstreaming model. Note that the specialist unit is still present, but that it is not responsible for implementation. Rather, it serves an advisory role to the entities that have this task; i.e., all parts of the organisation. In practice, this is the role of units such as the Environment policy division and Sida's HIV/AIDS group.

Figure 2: Mainstreaming model:



Expressed differently, by passing on responsibility for the implementation of the policy in question to the organisation at large, an additional layer is introduced in the chain of implementation in comparison to a model with specialist units. As has been noted, such an organisational layer of bureaucrats sandwiched between policy requirements distributed from headquarters and the demands from partners that they handle in their daily operation, often exercise considerable discretion with regard to the implementation of the stated goals of the organisation.⁵

Hence, from an organisational perspective, mainstreaming requires both creating (or at least providing) the capabilities necessary for all staff members to make informed considerations, and ensuring that all personnel possess the necessary commitment to conform to the requirements of the policy.

⁵ Michael Lipsky. 1980. *Street-Level Bureaucrats: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York. Ch. 2.

This dual task is not an easy one. In practice, though, Sida has at its disposal a number of instruments to handle the dilemmas involved in the mainstreaming requirements. Thus, capabilities are supposed to be created through staff training and through external helpdesks. Commitment is created through internal campaigns (e.g. the gender awareness campaign of early 2006). Finally, Sida may create institutions for the follow-up and oversight that contribute to the enforcement of policy requirements. (Although, as will be discussed below, the latter option is not in common use within the organisation.)

Such policy implementation instruments are up against a number of forces that may work against the effective application of a mainstreaming policy. Broadly speaking, such factors may be divided into the following categories:⁶

- Policy characteristics.
- Factors related to the organisation in question.
- Factors related to the behaviour of other agents.
- Factors related to the environment in which policy will be implemented.

Hence, if a policy contains unclear, unrealistic, or unfeasible lines of action, this imposes obvious obstacles to its implementation. Even with capable and committed staff, it may be impossible to carry out.⁷ In practice, however, such a situation usually leads to an informal adaptation of the policy in question. For mainstreaming, this poses a special set of problems as this approach demands understanding from the entirety of staff, and not only from specialists and persons with a particular commitment.

But obstacles may also come from general organisational factors. Thus even if capable and committed staff is present, the burden of work, administrative routines, or organisational model, may conspire against the effective consideration of the thematic area at hand. Again, mainstreaming strategies face particular problems in this regard, as they demand that staff primarily devoted to other tasks, incorporate in their work consideration of issues such as gender and sustainable development.

While the previous two sets of categories are primarily internal, two sets of external factors may also be discerned that may thwart the implementation of a policy. First of these are the partners and agencies to which Sida relate, and for whom Sida's mainstreaming policies also apply albeit indirectly. Second, a policy may be impossible to implement for reasons that are related to the context in which it is to be put into practice.

⁶ Adapted from Michael Hill and Peter Hupe. 2002. *Implementing Public Policy*. London. P. 123. Note that the list used here is an abbreviated version which collapses a number of the categories employed by Hill and Hupe.

⁷ Cf. Aaron Wildavsky. 1979. *Implementation in Context*. Printed as annex in Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky. *Implementation* (Revised edition). Berkeley.

Summing up, on a hypothetical level there are a number of problems that need to be overcome in order for mainstreaming to work in practice. Not only must staff members possess the necessary capability and commitment, they must also be able to overcome pressures and obstacles that may potentially arise from the policy itself, from the organisation in which they work, from their partners, or from the broader context in which implementation is supposed to occur.

Given such potential problems, the question is whether it has been possible to effectively implement policies such as this in Sida. The subsequent pages will draw on three evaluations of different mainstreaming themes in the organisation in order to answer two overall questions:

1. To what extent have mainstreaming policies been effectively implemented?
2. What have been the major factors affecting their implementation?

Three Evaluations of Sida's Work with Mainstreaming

The present report draws on three evaluations of different Sida-policies that stipulate mainstreaming approaches. Although with similar focus, the evaluations differed with regard to a number of practical details, as the following descriptions will make clear.

“Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Sida’s support for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries”, Sida Evaluation Report 02/01.⁸

The evaluation of Sida’s work with the mainstreaming of gender equality was performed in 2001 by a Danish-Canadian team. The Terms of Reference for the evaluation allocated 90–100 person weeks for the assignment, and proposed a focus on the integration of gender considerations in country strategies and dialogue, on changes that Sida’s promotion of such issues had made in concrete interventions, and on how the organisation’s understanding of relevant concepts could be enhanced.

Accordingly, the evaluation had focused heavily on case study research, and considered the experiences of Sida in Bangladesh, Nicaragua and South Africa. In these three countries, a relatively limited (twelve) number of concrete projects were thoroughly studied, and became central to the evaluation report. In comparison, Sida’s internal processes for implementing the strategy of gender mainstreaming were not as strong a focus.

“Turning Policy into Practice: Sida’s implementation of the Swedish HIV/AIDS strategy”, Sida Evaluation Report 05/21.⁹

In 2004, Sida commissioned an evaluation of how the organisation fulfilled the official Swedish policy with regard to HIV/AIDS; Investing for Future Generations. The evaluation was made by a Norwegian firm, and with German and Belgian participation. In comparison to the gender evaluation, the focus was somewhat more limited. Apart from a focus on a dozen country strategies, the consultants were asked to focus on internal practices, “organisation and methods”, at Sida through field studies on four countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ukraine, and Zambia (the embassy in New Delhi was also visited). The time allotted for this was 55 weeks.

⁸ Britha Mikkelsen, Ted Freeman, Bonnie Keller et al. 2002. Mainstreaming Gender Equality: Sida's support for the promotion of gender equality in partner countries. Stockholm.

⁹ Ulrich Vogel, Anne Skjelmerud, Pol Jansegers and Kim Forss. 2005. Turning Policy into Practice: Sida's implementation of the Swedish HIV/AIDS strategy. Stockholm.

The evaluation report focused very much on Sida's internal procedures and on mechanisms for implementing a mainstreaming strategy. Concrete assessments (of country strategies, contribution documents, and from field studies) were mostly presented in appendixes.

"Integrating the Environment? Environmental considerations in Sida's work", Sida Evaluation 06/42.¹⁰

The evaluation of Sida's integration of environmental concerns was the third of the "mainstreaming" evaluations. It was performed by the Swedish consultancy ÅF-Process during 2005 and 2006. In total, the consultants worked less than fifty weeks but, in comparison with the two other evaluations the material assessed was more extensive. Over hundred Sida documents were studied, along with 65 past and present country strategies. Moreover, the consultants perused documentation from 89 projects, in field studies at the Sida offices in Albania, Bolivia, Kosovo, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam.

The evaluation report dealt extensively with problems and causes in Sida's implementation of environmental mainstreaming. Focus was primarily on internal organisational factors, and on the overall environmental management system. The perspective was primarily derived from the field visits, and was oriented towards that level in the organisation. Apart from the focus on environmental issues, the consultants made explicit comparisons with the other mainstreaming themes; gender and HIV/AIDS.

¹⁰ Kerstin Brunnström, Hans Hargbäck, Per Lagerstedt and Jan Olsson. 2006. Integrating the Environment? Environmental Considerations in Sida's Work. Stockholm.

Comparison: Does Mainstreaming Work?

The three evaluations paint a varied picture of the mainstreaming of the three themes. Thus, while the evaluations of Sida's work with gender and HIV/AIDS are generally quite appreciative of the organisation's activities, the environmental one is more critical.

However, in practice the three reports are more unanimous in their judgement. While the gender evaluation noted that "the interventions studied did not meet the high level of ambition outlined in Sida's Action Programme"¹¹, the evaluation on Sida's work with environmental sustainability claimed that Sida had not yet "succeeded in fulfilling the ambitions in the environmental policy"¹². Similarly, the HIV/AIDS one stated that "Sida is on the right track, but substantial challenges are ahead ... [The agency] does not have to substantially change its HIV/AIDS policies, strategies and instruments of implementation, but most aspects can be improved."¹³

Furthermore, the judgement is similar for the different components of Sida's work considered, as will be detailed below.

Country Strategies

All of the evaluations evaluated a number of country strategies and relevant accompanying documents from the standpoint of whether they incorporated the three themes or not.

The gender evaluation considered a rather limited number of country documents, and generally reached a favourable conclusion: "Sida country strategies reflected a serious effort to mainstream gender equality as a goal at the strategic level"¹⁴. However, it was also noted that the strategies varied in their treatment of the issue and that "there is still a strong need in country strategies to ensure that goals in gender equality are explicitly linked to goals in other areas such as poverty reduction and democratic development and to programme sectors such as health, education and urban development"¹⁵.

¹¹ Mikkelsen et al. op. cit., p. 77.

¹² Brunström et al. op. cit., p. 86.

¹³ Vogel et al. op. cit., p. ix.

¹⁴ Mikkelsen et al. op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The evaluation of Sida's work with HIV/AIDS applied a slightly different methodology, which compared the attention to the disease in the country strategy with prevalence rates in the country. On this basis, they concluded that only half of the dozen country strategies satisfactorily considered HIV/AIDS to the degree justified by the epidemic.¹⁶ In fact, the consultants were led to conclude that "In general, the discussion on mainstreaming is weak in all the country strategy documents. With few exceptions, the documents do not demonstrate that HIV/AIDS aspects have been considered for in-depth analysis, and subsequently for key interventions in the countries."¹⁷

Neither did the environmental evaluation hand out high marks for the integration of this issue in the country strategies. While it noted that 16 out of 17 country analyses included in the study considered environmental issues, and that the mainstreaming requirement was thus met in these documents, only somewhat more than half of the 65 past and present country strategies considered met acceptable standards.¹⁸ (They also noted that this figure had increased over time though.) Moreover, they remarked that treatment of the issue tended to be of an "either/or" character: In certain countries, the theme was very present both as a priority and as a cross-cutting theme. In others it was entirely absent.

Thus, with regard to country strategy documents, there seems to be a difference between the three themes. Indeed, the environmental study made such a comparison between the treatment of the issues. Its conclusion was that "In comparison, integration of gender equality is of higher quality, less often omitted and indicated less of a range between responses. HIV/AIDS show more of the same pattern as environment, even though less clear, with better coverage in countries where HIV/AIDS really constitutes a serious problem."¹⁹

Hence, while the country strategies seem to be mainstreaming gender to a large extent, treatment of the two other themes seems more erratic; good in some cases, absent in others. It is probable that whether these issues are included or not reflects the extent to which problems related to HIV/AIDS and the environment are directly evident in the country. Still, such a situation is actually the opposite of mainstreaming, in which these issues shall be consistently considered even if there is no evidence of a disastrous situation in their particular area.

¹⁶ Vogel et al. op. cit., appendix 1, p. 17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Brunström, op. cit., p. 38f.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

Contributions

Although to varying degrees, all the three evaluations considered Sida-financed projects. Hence, while the gender evaluation included a thorough assessment of twelve contributions, the environmental one looked at the available documentation from 89 contributions. The HIV/AIDS evaluation, in turn, made a re-evaluation of 21 projects in Africa that had previously been evaluated, but added information by juxtaposing them with information on the severity of the epidemic in each individual case.

As with the country strategies, the gender evaluation found that mainstreaming of this subject was taking place, albeit in a scattered and non-systematic fashion. As it noted, “[r]ather than a coherent and systematic mainstreaming ‘process’, the steps in the model constituted a ‘menu’ of choices, from which interventions mainstreamed in an eclectic manner”.²⁰

Still, this judgement was much more positive than the one made by the evaluation of Sida’s work with HIV/AIDS. This study was forced to note that the results (measured on a 0 – 3 scale)

“...do not look very good: 4 years after the introduction of the [policy], which insists on the ‘strong relationship between HIV/AIDS and poverty, gender inequality, human rights and sustainable development’, one could expect that about 100 per cent of the African projects would score the maximum, i.e. three, or at least two. Yet, eight out of 21 projects score either zero or one; and none of the regional/global project does better than one (1)!”²¹.

When juxtaposed with the actual situation in the countries, the results came out somewhat more favourably, with ten (out of the 21) projects having “done exactly what was needed”.²² Even so, a third of the projects were far from the requirements, and should — according to the consultants — never have been accepted for funding if the policy had been effectively implemented.

In comparison, the environmental evaluation considered the documentation from a more extended sample of 89 projects from six countries. Of these, seven contained the mandatory environmental impact assessment (EIA), and in another 39 there was just a brief statement. In half of the contributions considered, the mandatory assessment appeared to have been completely disregarded.

In addition, the environmental evaluation noted that when an environmental impact assessment was performed, it tended to be very focused on possible negative impacts, i.e., a “do no harm”-approach.²³ But by doing so, opportu-

²⁰ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 65.

²¹ Vogel et al. op. cit., annex, p. 44.

²² Ibid., p. 45.

²³ Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 34.

nities for more positive, proactive inclusion of an environmental dimension is likely to be left out. In fact, a similar consideration was found by the gender evaluation, which cautioned against a simplistic “all or nothing”-approach to the theme.²⁴

Dialogue, Donor Coordination and Budget Support

Although it is a difficult theme to consider due to its subjective and qualitative character, the evaluations also bring forward questions related to development dialogue, particularly in relation to sector- and budget support.

The gender evaluation did include a consideration of how the theme was treated in Bangladesh, Nicaragua, and South Africa. The overall finding was that Sweden had a tradition of actively raising the issue. However, it was also noted that such interventions often lacked specificity and clear objectives,²⁵ and suffered from staff shortages. At the intervention level, it was found that possibilities were often not used to the full potential extent.²⁶

The explicit focus on dialogue was not brought up by the two subsequent evaluations. However, they dealt with a related theme that was not touched upon by the former one; Sida’s work with donor coordination and with sector- and budget support.

The evaluation on Sida’s work with HIV/AIDS limited itself to noting that such initiatives brought important possibilities to scale up and strengthen this kind of work.²⁷ However, it also noted that such modalities also imply difficulties in pushing Swedish priorities forward, particularly in view of staff limits and an absence of clear prioritisation among issues.²⁸

The environmental evaluation repeated some of these worries. Thus it noted that new forms of support (sector and budget support) will probably require more staff skill if a theme such as the environment is to be effectively included.²⁹ Moreover, it remarked that it may well become more complicated to incorporate Swedish priorities in such a support.³⁰

With the partial exception of the gender evaluation, it is clear that each of the evaluations is unable to provide firm conclusions as to Sida’s dialogue work. Rather, the issues deduced and discussed are to some extent hypothetical. Even so, it is however clear that all evaluations see dialogue and new forms of support as potentially problematic areas with regard to mainstreaming issues, and that a large amount of skill and competence will be required if such questions are to be effectively integrated.

²⁴ Mikkelsen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 108.

²⁵ Mikkelsen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 24f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Vogel et al., *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁹ Brunström et al., *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Other Material

Apart from country studies, dialogue issues and individual contributions, each of the three evaluations considered additional material, such as previous evaluations and base-line studies (HIV/AIDS and environment), policy documents (environment), interviews with Sida staff (HIV/AIDS and environment) and overall availability of funding (HIV/AIDS).

Although such material added to the description, in no case did it alter the overall view of implementation as insufficient and subject to large variations.

Summary

No matter what the material considered, the three evaluations consistently found that Sida's practices fall short of its ambitious goals in these areas. Although generally positive towards Sida's work, the evaluation of gender mainstreaming stated that the policy "has not yet produced many of the more significant changes in the content of bilateral interventions that were expected of it".³¹ Similarly, the evaluation of Sida's work with HIV/AIDS noted a number of significant advances, but also that the organisation faced "substantial challenges" in order to fully implement its policy.³² The environmental evaluation, finally, was possibly the most critical one. It concluded that "integration of environmental concerns is not fulfilled, in spite of a widespread awareness among staff that sustainable development is one of the overall objectives and that everyone is required to integrate environmental issues in his or her activities".³³

The last quote sums up the three observations that recur across the evaluations: Sida staff appears to have the best intentions and a high degree of commitment to all three issues, and Sida's policies attempt to codify this into bold and advanced goals. However, in the practical implementation, each of the three policies fall short of these ambitions, which leads to a considerable gap between what Sida says and what the organisation does.

More in particular, integration of the three issues appears to be unevenly implemented across the organisation and frequently subject to the personal interest, competence and motivations of individual staff members.³⁴ Such a situation, where the effective treatment of the issues to be mainstreamed varies between officers and persons in the organisation is of course fully explicable given the decentralised responsibility that a mainstreaming strategy entails. Yet the outcome — a differentiated treatment in which these issues are sometimes not included or considered at all — is squarely counter to the intentions of the policy.

The question then, is, what are the causes of such a disjunction?

³¹ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 106.

³² Vogel et al., op. cit., p. ix.

³³ Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 70.

³⁴ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 70; Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 85; Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 40ff.

Comparison: The Reasons for Non-compliance?

Above different categories of potential obstacles for the successful implementation of a policy were sketched. Below, the extent to which they are present in the three evaluation reports is detailed. In this regard, the three evaluations are remarkably consistent in their findings. What is indicated are primarily internal problems that relate to Sida's overall mode of work and organisation.

Policy-related Factors

The first set of potential difficulties relates to the policy itself. A policy may be unclear, contradictory, unfeasible, or simply counter-productive with regard to the goal that it sets. In the former cases, the result is likely to be a thwarted implementation, in the latter case, of course, the consequences may be much worse.³⁵

Fortunately, none of the three evaluations sees the policy that is their focus as misguided or counter-productive. As will be discussed further below, they are generally appreciative of the mainstreaming approach. They do however find a number of problems relating to the clarity, level of ambition and connection to other goals in the three policies.

A first policy-related problem that is mentioned in all three evaluations concerns the level of specification of the mainstreaming policies themselves. As the gender evaluation found, written guidelines and tools distributed in the organisation were seldom used, and often found to be difficult to apply to specific purposes.³⁶ Similarly, the environmental evaluation noted as a chief problem that "Sida has created an overall environmental policy, but has not broken it down into targets possible to apply at the contribution level [...] POs in general do not understand how to apply the environmental policy."³⁷ While the HIV/AIDS evaluation was not as harsh in its judgement, it nevertheless noted that the policy documents had been succeeded by a confusing "plethora" of additional documents, and recommended that they all be integrated into a single updated, "action-oriented" and "user-friendly" document.³⁸

³⁵ Wildavsky, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Mikkelsen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 79.

³⁷ Brunström et al., *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁸ Vogel et al., *op. cit.*, pp. vii and 60.

With regard to the relationship of the policy to other guiding documents at Sida, the gender evaluation noted that a revision of the policy would be needed in order to establish “a direct link between gender equality and poverty reduction”.³⁹ Similarly, the evaluation of Sida’s work with HIV/AIDS called for the integration of that theme into all of Sida’s policies, a call that was also raised in the environmental evaluation, which found that there was a very uneven treatment of environment in sector policies and other central Sida documents.

An additional policy-related problem that recurs across the three evaluations is the absence of clear goals against which performance and improvement could be measured and monitored. In the gender evaluation this was expressed as the absence of “requirements [...] for a reasonable minimum level of gender equality mainstreaming”.⁴⁰ Similarly, the HIV/AIDS evaluation noted that “no benchmarks were fixed or spelled out in any measurable way for what would be indicators for ‘satisfaction’ in the implementation of the [policy]”.⁴¹ The same remarks were echoed by the evaluation of Sida’s work with environmentally sustainable development, although in even sharper terms, as it notes that by only setting objectives, but no targets, Sida’s policy represents a “major deviation” from established practice with regard to Environmental Management Systems.⁴²

As can be seen then, there are some policy-related points that the three evaluations have in common. In the first place, they note that the policies themselves are not always perceived as clear and applicable by programme officers. Second, there is often too little integration between the themes in question and other goals/policies in Sida. Third, they all remark on the absence of clear targets and requirements in these policies, which is seen as detrimental to their implementation.

To a large extent, these suggestions reflect similar problems as those that will be described below as proper to Sida’s organisation, namely, the absence of mechanisms for monitoring and follow-up, and the difficulty of bringing together and integrating different policies.

Problems Related to Sida’s Organisation

There are a number of potential internal explanations of the failure to successfully implement a mainstreaming policy in an organisation, i.e., reasons for why its statements are not abided by. These are related to systems for follow-up and management, resource allocation, staff competence, etc.

Indeed, problems that relate to Sida’s internal procedures are very frequently mentioned in the three evaluation reports. What follows are a number of points on which there is great extent consistency in the reports.

³⁹ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 103.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. xv.

⁴¹ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 36f.

⁴² Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 49.

Lack of prioritization

All three evaluations note that a major obstacle for their implementation consists in the sheer number of other policies and priorities with which each issue has to compete for attention. This problem is mentioned with particular frequency in the field studies of each evaluation.

Hence, the gender evaluation described the problem as “the crowded nature of the policy agenda” and notes that in practice the different policies were treated as mutually exclusive in that more emphasis on one of them would result in less treatment of the rest.⁴³ In almost the same words, the evaluation of Sida’s work with HIV/AIDS concluded that “[t]he multiplicity of cross-cutting issues proposed for mainstreaming is another constraint. Rather many Sida staff seem to feel that HIV/AIDS mainstreaming competes for attention with other cross-cutting issues”.⁴⁴ As the evaluators also noted: “There is certainly a limit on the absorptive capacity of the organisation. It is not unlikely that the HIV/AIDS policy has encountered resistance because of that. [...] [I]t also seems likely that it is less effective than it would have been in an environment with fewer policies”.⁴⁵

The environmental evaluation, which had a strong focus on the views of Sida’s staff in Stockholm and in the field, reached similar conclusions. One of them was that Sida’s programme officers face a dilemma which they deal with as best they can. Time is limited and “as there are no formal rules and regulations for how to handle the prioritization [between policies] each programme officer will have to make up a personal set of priorities, leading to a situation where similar issues are considered differently within Sida”.⁴⁶

This demonstrates an inherent problem in mainstreaming approaches. By depending on individual officers for implementation, such policies are also dependent on the time and priorities established by each staff member. The potential problems in this regard are exacerbated by the absence of clear guidelines or firm targets for compliance.

Lack of follow-up

Absence of follow-up or monitoring of results is mentioned in all three evaluations as an impediment to the successful implementation of the policies. Hence, the gender evaluation listed “weaknesses in systems and procedures for monitoring results” as one of the constraints faced by gender mainstreaming.⁴⁷ The HIV/AIDS evaluation eloquently devoted a heading to formulating the problem: “Missing structures and absent processes: where is the monitoring?” and concluded that “there is no coherent and systematic system for

⁴³ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 108.

⁴⁴ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Brunström et al., op. cit., p. 47.

⁴⁷ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 108.

monitoring progress in the implementation of the [policy]”.⁴⁸ Similarly, the evaluation of Sida’s environmental work made the more general observation that “[t]he follow up of integration of mainstreaming issues is irregular and almost non-existent, a fact that naturally inflicts severely on the quality of the mainstreaming of environmental issues”.⁴⁹

Such observations can obviously be related to the previously noted fact that neither concrete requirements nor targets are present in the three policies. Without such elements, monitoring and follow-up becomes much harder to perform on a systematic or continuous basis.

There is a supplementary element to this problem. While weak systems for follow-up can partly be explained with reference to absent targets, it also relates to systems of accountability more in general. Follow-up requires that responsibilities have been assigned for performing both the work that shall be monitored and the monitoring itself. However, an additional weakness that features in all three evaluations is the absence of clarity with regard to who is responsible for mainstreaming issues.

Lack of clear responsibilities

All three evaluations dwell on the question of unclear responsibilities, and concurrent to this, the fact that personal commitment becomes central to the handling of the issue in question.

The gender evaluation noted that in the handling of individual contributions, this factor became crucial, as staff differs in their attitudes, and that some believe “that it is almost as if gender mainstreaming is ‘voluntary’”.⁵⁰ The antidote they proposed was that “it is important to reach some agreement on the role and responsibility of the different actors”.⁵¹

Again the HIV/AIDS evaluation reflected the same conclusion as it contained both criticism against the lack of organisational adaptation to the policy, and the recommendation that a steering group at the top managerial level of Sida be established to monitor and steer its implementation.⁵² The environmental evaluation, in turn, went even further by stating that there appeared to be a lack of support from management for the issue, which obstructed the implementation of the policy.⁵³

Lack of learning

Related to the previous points, all three evaluations mention as an additional obstacle the lack of mechanisms for sharing lessons and learning from the

⁴⁸ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁹ Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 48.

⁵⁰ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 78.

⁵¹ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. xvi.

⁵² Vogel et al., op. cit., pp. 39 and 60.

⁵³ Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 46.

experiences of others. Ideally, this function could for instance have been fulfilled by a functioning network of focal points that includes Sida's field representation. But all three evaluations find that the diffusion of experiences is a deficiency within Sida.

This deficiency appears to be particularly acute in the field. Thus, the gender evaluation noted an "absence of mechanisms for sharing lessons learned in gender equality at the embassy level", and the evaluators considering Sida's work with HIV/AIDS also noted discontent and open criticism with this absence, and about the lack of documentation of positive and practical examples.⁵⁴

The same criticism was repeated by the evaluation of Sida's work with sustainable development which went so far as to state that

"Sida is not a learning organization when it comes to integration of environmental issues. Experiences gained during one contribution preparation process cannot be used by another programme officer preparing a similar contribution. There is no networking, no mainstreaming seminars, nor are there workshops arranged to share and compile best practices and good examples".⁵⁵

This lack of learning and absence of good examples becomes particularly acute in view of the rather lofty character of the relevant policy documents and the perceived need for enhanced clarity as to how their statements can be transformed into practice. Furthermore the problem is made worse by the fact that staff competence with regard to the identification and analysis of the three issues is often found wanting.

Lack of staff competence

As was noted in the initial discussion on the conditions for mainstreaming, such a policy strategy is demanding with regard to staff competence. In order to be able to integrate these issues in their work, staff must have the necessary skills, formation, and understanding to grasp possibilities and challenges. To a certain extent, the absence of such competence can be made up for by advisory services such as helpdesks, special advisors, etc. However, in order to refer a case/contribution to such services in the first place, a programme officer needs to be able to identify potential problems or opportunities.

In fact, the question of staff competence is brought forward as a problem in all three evaluations, although to varying degrees. In two of the evaluations, this is coupled to the fact that Sida staff is rather thinly spread geographically. As the gender evaluation noted, there is a deficit of necessary knowledge at Sida. Moreover:

⁵⁴ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 108; Vogel et al., op. cit., pp. 46 and 90.

⁵⁵ Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 44.

“Sida faces a strong challenge in responding to the need for trained, motivated and capable staff resources to advance the goal of gender equality while dealing with the reality of limited staff complements and budgets. There is an inherent contradiction, however, between the continuing development of more sophisticated development co-operation goals and policy structures and efforts to deliver programmes with a relatively small staff complement at the embassy level.”⁵⁶

The same problem — high demands on staff competence coupled with numerically reduced staffs — was brought forward in the evaluation of Sida’s work with HIV/AIDS which noted in its field study that staff “AIDS-competency” varied considerably, and tied this to the additional problem of widely and thinly spread human resources, which was seen by the evaluation as the single most important obstacle to the effective implementation of the policy.⁵⁷

In difference to the previous two, the evaluation of Sida’s work with environmentally sustainable development did not explicitly mention staff scarcity as a problem. Instead the evaluators remarked that mainstreaming of environmental issues face particular problems due to the fact that “few programme officers have a theoretical education in environmental issues”.⁵⁸ Hence, as with the previous evaluations they noted the need to enhance staff competence.

Lack of support

The fact that not all Sida staff can be expected to be competent to make judgments with regard to the three issues for mainstreaming has, of course, been obvious to the creators of the three policies. Thus, a number of support functions have been put in place to assist Sida’s staff with regard to these themes.

Although the three evaluations are generally quite appreciative of these structures, they note a number of problems related to them. In this regard, it should be noted that the object of evaluation differed between the three, however, since the support tools and instruments set up for each theme differ considerably.

Thus, the gender evaluation only discussed the use of short training courses provided for Sida’s officers and partners. The judgment of these was rather severe, they had “often been a one-off exercise or was too short in duration and not sufficiently sector- and thematic-specific to make the expected impact. [...] The whole issue of tools for gender mainstreaming need to be rethought, especially in the context of their utility for programme staff who are faced with heavy work burdens and pressures of time.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 111.

⁵⁷ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 53f.

⁵⁸ Brunström et al., op. cit., p. 66.

⁵⁹ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 75.

In contrast, the HIV/AIDS evaluation was highly appreciative of the work of the Lusaka-based regional team for the issue, and the regional advisors placed in New Delhi. It was also very positive of the work done by the HIV/AIDS secretariat. The evaluation's main criticism in this regard was that such structures are not available in all geographic environments in which Sida works.⁶⁰ Also, the evaluators noted that their position within Sida's organisation is not sufficiently clear.

The environment evaluation did not focus on the work of regional advisors. Instead, it looked at two other instruments available to support staff in environmental matters; training and the two helpdesks available at the universities of Gothenburg and Umeå respectively.

In their field report, the consultants voiced scepticism as to the viability to conduct short training courses in order to make staff competent to make environmental judgements. Quite simply, the policy was described as too ambitious and difficult to adapt for most programme officers "without an academic title in natural sciences or engineering to comply" with it, and the consultants also noted that short courses could not realistically be expected to alleviate this problem.⁶¹ The critique was thus the same as was raised in the gender evaluation; that brief training events are likely to be insufficient.

Central to the environmental field support system are the two helpdesks available for Strategic Environmental Analyses, and for Environmental Impact Assessments respectively. While the evaluation was not able to say much about the former, the evaluators noted that they have obtained quite different responses about the work of the latter. While many programme officers seemed content with it and its approach was deemed to be very professional, there were also those who were critical of the approach of the helpdesk, claiming that it created more problems than it solved.⁶² According to this line of critique, the helpdesk often adds new requirements and issues, rather than helping staff solve the problems they have encountered. Additionally, the evaluators noted that there may be a poor fit between the advice from the helpdesk and the local context in which it is supposed to be implemented.⁶³

One structure that the themes of gender, HIV/AIDS and environment have in common is the focal point system, which consists of individual programme officers at departments and field offices that have special responsibility for the mainstreaming issue in question. All three evaluations contain some critical views of the workings of this system, however.

⁶⁰ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 61.

⁶¹ Brunnström et al., op. cit., appendix 10, p. 119.

⁶² Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 42.

⁶³ Whether such critique is justified or not, it is clear that the helpdesk is very infrequently used. Approximately 50 contributions are submitted to it for consideration each year, which is a very small fraction of the totality of Sida cases in which the Environmental Impact Assessment should be performed.

The gender evaluation did not say much about the focal points, but still cautioned against the view that they should have responsibility for gender issues; such a responsibility is incumbent on all Sida staff, the evaluation reminded its readers.⁶⁴ Similar although more elaborate criticisms appear in the evaluations of Sida's work with HIV/AIDS and environmentally sustainable development. In particular, they both found that there was seldom much clarity about the focal points' responsibilities, status or even their necessary competence.⁶⁵ Moreover, the HIV/AIDS evaluation even found that there were no focal points assigned in some departments.⁶⁶

Summing up, there are a number of recurring problems related to Sida's internal organisation that are mentioned in all three evaluations. These appear to be interrelated to a very large extent. The multiplicity of objectives and priorities makes prioritization difficult. The result is that programme officers often evade mainstreaming themes. This is not noticed, however, as there is no system for follow-up. Moreover, as there is no clear responsibility for these issues, the problem of insufficient monitoring can go on undetected for a long time. Even when detected, however, it is unclear what happens.

Apart from the fact that there is no systematic follow-up of achievements in the different fields, there is also an absence of feed-back from positive examples that could contribute to learning. This is particularly grave as there is often a competence deficit in Sida's staff. The support instruments put into place, in turn, appears insufficient to alleviate this deficit either because of their character (e.g. very brief training courses) or because they are too thinly spread (e.g. the regional advisers on HIV/AIDS).

There are thus a number of features within Sida's own organisation that generates non-compliance with the three policies under consideration here. These problems increase as Sida will subsequently have to try to enforce the policy statements and positions on external actors that are sometimes reluctant to consider such aspects.

External Factors

In comparison with the attention given to internal factors in the three evaluations, external factors (related to the context of the partner countries, interest and political will of partners, etc.) figure much less frequently. Partly, this may reflect a bias in the design of the evaluations; as they take as their point of departure Sida and its policies, it may be more natural (and practical) to look for causes for deficiencies within the organisations.

However, there are some problems and obstacles of an external nature that are frequently brought up in the evaluations.

⁶⁴ Mikkelsen et al., op. cit., p. 111.

⁶⁵ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 30 ; Brunnström et al., op. cit., p. 43.

⁶⁶ Vogel et al., op. cit., p. 29.

Both the evaluation of gender and the one on environment made reference to the need to adapt positions and interventions to the context in which they will be implemented. For instance, the gender evaluation noted that Sida staff needs to become better at capitalising on available opportunities.⁶⁷ The environmental evaluation took a broader perspective, calling for more information on national conditions, legislation, and capacity to integrate with environmental considerations.⁶⁸

Somewhat more concretely, all three evaluations noted that the political will of partner countries and agencies may be lacking with regard to the priority given to themes that Sida sees as fundamental. Such a problem was noted in the gender evaluation, which suggested that the choice of partners would need to take into account their positions on that issue.⁶⁹ Although the evaluation of Sida's work with HIV/AIDS only mentioned this problem in relation to budget and sector programme support, it did note that the question of concord between Swedish and partner country priorities may be an issue.⁷⁰ In comparison, the environmental evaluation stressed this problem to a much larger extent as it noted that there may often be a disjunction between Swedish standards for environmental impact assessment on the one hand, and national priorities and legislation on the other.⁷¹ Moreover, it noted that Sida's regulation in this regard is often in conflict with partners' views.⁷²

⁶⁷ Mikkelsen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁶⁸ Brunström et al., *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶⁹ Mikkelsen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ Vogel et al., *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁷¹ Brunström et al., *op. cit.*, p. 60ff.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xi.

Common Problems Related to the Implementation of Mainstreaming Strategies

The above summary has presented a number of problems and how they appear in the evaluations of Sida's work with gender-, HIV/AIDS-, and environmentally related issues. The picture painted is rather critical, in that numerous factors are presented as obstacles to Sida's work, and that these are often internal to Sida, i.e., there are problems within Sida itself that hinders the effective fulfilment of the organisation's policies.

Conversely, one should also note factors that are not indicated as problems in the evaluations. For instance, lack of financial resources is not brought forward as an obstacle, neither is lack of available competence of a more general kind (for instance, on how HIV/AIDS can be targeted, or what constitutes environmentally sustainable development). The absence of such factors in the enumeration of challenges and obstacles shows that knowledge and resources are not the problem, it is rather how they are transformed into action at Sida.

A caveat should be added to this list of obstacles and problems. One should remember that each evaluation also enumerates factors that work well and that assist the implementation of each policy. As the focus here has been on common causes for the lack of policy implementation, such factors have not been mentioned. To a certain extent, their inclusion could balance the picture, even as the overall result – that mainstreaming of the three themes has not been successful – would be the same. The reader should be aware, though, that all evaluations contain more positive remarks as to Sida's commitment to these goals and objectives, Sida's level of ambition, the contents of certain policy documents, etc.

Experiences from Other Organisations

On a different note, one should take into account that evaluations of similar themes in other organisations have reached conclusions that are very similar to what has been described above. Some examples from evaluations of DFID and EC's work with gender and environmental mainstreaming can serve to demonstrate this:

Evaluation of the EC's work with gender mainstreaming

In 2003 a report was concluded on gender issues in EC development cooperation.⁷³ The evaluation noted that the commission had established a strong regulatory framework for the issue, which is to be included in “all EC policy and programmes”.⁷⁴ In practice, however, activities fall short of the ambitions of the policy. Gender considerations were found to be only partially integrated in the organisation’s policies, and other internal gender-focused activities were often poorly integrated with work in general. In external actions, the EC support for the issue was found to be “sporadic and highly varied in approach”.⁷⁵

Among the reasons for this state of affairs, the evaluation included:

- Absence of clear support and incentives from top levels in the organisation.
- Weak capacity and approaches for mainstreaming.
- Lack of monitoring and reporting (which the report called “a critical weakness”).⁷⁶
- Insufficient staffing and lack of support functions.
- Lessons are not drawn from positive examples that do exist.

Evaluation of DFID's work with gender mainstreaming

Similarly, a recent evaluation of DFID’s work with gender mainstreaming reached conclusions that are very similar to the findings above: While the evaluation noted important advances, it also found that the policy was unevenly implemented, and that the “unevenness of gender mainstreaming can be attributed to inconsistency at policy, conceptual and institutional level as well as to an insufficiently enabling environment”.⁷⁷

Among the problems mentioned were:

- Lack of applicable and enforced guidelines.
- Insufficient staffing for mainstreaming.
- Inadequate tools and instruments for analysis and learning.

⁷³ Mary Braithwaite et al. 2003. “Thematic Evaluation of the Integration of Gender in EC Development Cooperation with Third Countries”. European Commission.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. v.

⁷⁷ Rikke Ingrid Jensen et al. 2006. “Evaluation of DFID’s Policy and Practice in Support of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Synthesis Report”. Department for International Development. London. P. xi.

Audit of EC's inclusion of environmental concerns in its international cooperation

Only a couple of months ago the European court of auditors published a report on “the environmental aspects of the Commission’s development cooperation”, with a focus quite similar to the evaluation just performed on Sida’s work with the same issue.⁷⁸

As before, the report found implementation of the EC policy in this regard wanting. Key elements (such as manuals and helpdesks) had not been established, and while the projects undertaken in the area was considered relevant, they often fell short of ambitions.

Among the problems brought forward in this study were the absence of follow-up, evaluation and identification of important lessons in the area, and inadequate levels of staffing. Additionally, the report mentioned problems related to the absence of political will in the partner countries, and problems regarding the introduction of the theme in budgetary support programmes.

Audit of DFID's environmental work

Most scathing in its critique, is a recent parliamentary audit of DFID’s environmental work.⁷⁹ It was found that the theme is unevenly implemented across the organisation. Moreover, the study found highly varying quality of environmental analysis which reflects that “the seriousness and thoroughness with which the environment is considered in country offices is very much dependent on the knowledge and commitment of individuals. This has got to change.”⁸⁰ Among the problems mentioned in connection with this were; lack of targets, lack of accountability, and lack of analytical capacity.

The final judgement is worth quoting at length, as an example of the kind of critique that can be levied against a mainstreaming strategy, no matter how well-intentioned:

“The conclusions of the recent evaluations of DFID country programmes could not be more damning. They demonstrate DFID’s failure to implement a coherent approach to integrating the environment on the ground. They also clearly show that environmental screening has been allowed to become nothing more than a poorly drafted paper exercise. The situation as stands is a tragic waste of both resources and opportunities that has got to change quickly.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ (European) Court of Auditors. 2006. “Special Report No 6/2006 concerning the environmental aspects of the Commission’s development cooperation, together with the Commission’s replies”. In Official Journal of the European Union. C 235/1. Sept. 29.

⁷⁹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. 2006. “Trade, Development and Environment: The Role of DFID”. House of Commons, London.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 8f.

Is Mainstreaming Feasible?

The previous examples are instructive as they demonstrate that mainstreaming is a strategy that is often fraught with problems, not only in Sida. In this regard, it is worth noting that several of the problems mentioned tend to recur across different organisations and themes: for instance lack of concrete goals, absence of monitoring and follow-up, lack of clear responsibility, varied and unsystematic approaches, and insufficient staffing. Indeed, such problems appear to be inherent to the mainstreaming strategy rather than dependent on the organisation or issue at hand.

Such evidence should serve to initiate a discussion about the feasibility of implementing mainstreaming strategies. Although that question goes far beyond the purpose of the present paper, some initial queries can nevertheless be drawn from the preceding pages: Is it possible to implement the mainstreaming of complex issues in organisations that have so diverse fields of activity as donor agencies? What are the resources necessary for effective mainstreaming as opposed to alternative implementation strategies? How can mainstreaming be reconciled with efforts to increase local ownership and harmonisation? Is it practically feasible to mainstream more than a very reduced number of themes in an organisation? Such questions, although critical, must be taken seriously if Sida shall try to match its lofty goals with effective action.

Still, the three evaluations of Sida's work are practically unanimous in their support for mainstreaming as a strategy. While being critical of their implementation, they nevertheless support the basic tenets of the policies, in particular, that due to the crucial nature of these three issues they need to be integrated as cross-cutting issues interwoven into each and every contribution of the organisation.

Hence, it may be that the crucial issue is not whether to choose a mainstreaming strategy or not, but rather how such a strategy can be effectively implemented. What the findings referred to above indicate is that it is hard to overestimate the difficulties involved in putting such an approach into practice. Hence, there is an urgent need to discuss measures that can counter such problems, and contribute to a more effective implementation.

Comparison: The Recommendations

Fortunately, the three evaluations do not only offer support for mainstreaming as a strategy, but also advice on how it can be implemented in an enhanced and more effective way. To a large extent, such recommendations draw on the problems described above, and do not need further motivation. What follows is not an exhaustive list, but a compilation of the most prominent ones (the list excludes recommendations that are idiosyncratic to a particular theme, such as having a workplace policy on HIV/AIDS).

- All three evaluations contain recommendations aimed at the policies themselves. What they call for is typically an adaptation to make the documents more applicable and useful to programme officers, through the clarification of key concepts, establishments of clear goals and requirements, and integrating manuals and similar documents into the policies.
- Furthermore, all three evaluations recommend that Sida enhance the treatment of different mainstreaming issues in connection to other policies and priorities. This can be done either through clearer demonstration of possible synergies, through efforts to integrate the three mainstreaming policies into a coherent whole, or by establishing a hierarchy of priorities for programme officers.
- All three evaluations are also emphatic that Sida needs to become better at integrating experiences and lessons learnt in its work. This is often coupled with a suggestion to improve the support functions available to individual programme officers, and to make such assistance more practically oriented.
- Another common theme in the recommendation of the three evaluations is that Sida needs to clarify responsibility and roles with regard to each mainstreaming theme. In this respect, the evaluation of Sida's work with HIV/AIDS goes furthest by calling for the establishment of a steering committee consisting of departments' managers.
- In connection with the two previous points, all evaluations also call for the establishment of systems for follow-up and monitoring for each theme. In the gender and environmental evaluations, this suggestion is also linked to the recommendation to establish clear goals and requirements with regard to mainstreaming.

- Ultimately, all evaluations call for an allocation of staffing and support that better reflects the priorities contained in each policy. As one part of this, the focal point functions are singled out as a necessary object for improvement.

Conclusions

As has been seen above, Sida has a mixed record with regard to mainstreaming. While aspirations are generally set high, they are often implemented in a haphazard fashion, as detailed in the three evaluations. Furthermore, the evaluations concur on a number of obstacles that obstruct mainstreaming strategies at Sida. The majority of these are related to Sida's internal organisation, and include an overload of policies, unclear responsibility for implementation, absence of mechanisms for follow-up and monitoring of progress, lack of clear goals and requirements, to mention just the most prominent ones. In addition, it is frequently mentioned that increased efforts at donor harmonisation, and more use of sector- and budget support may actually bring additional problems for the mainstreaming of these themes.

Apart from being critical of how Sida has performed mainstreaming, the three evaluations concur on one point though: They are adamant that Sida should not abandon mainstreaming as a method of implementation. What they call for is enhanced application of this line of action, not its substitution.

The fact that mainstreaming is consistently described as a strategy fraught with problems in Sida and in other donor organisations should lead to a discussion about the possibilities and challenges such a strategy faces. Ultimately, though, it is possibly inconceivable that Sida should retract from the requirement that considerations of gender, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability be included in all its work (although the case for HIV/AIDS may be more dependent on contextual factors than the other two). Hence, the question is one of policy implementation rather than policy formulation.

With regard to implementation, the present report has noted that there is considerable scope for improvement. The challenge involved in overcoming obstacles such as the ones discussed above should not be underestimated. But given the weight and importance of the issues involved, neither can it be avoided.

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Mainstreaming at Sida

Mainstreaming implies that a theme or issue shall be considered in all lines of work within the organisation. The responsibility for a particular policy or issue is not the responsibility of a specialised unit but is incumbent on all staff. Hence it is a demanding mode of implementation as it requires competence, capacity and commitment to implement a policy among all staff in the organisation.

This synthesis report draws on the conclusions from three previous evaluations on the mainstreaming of Sida's policies on gender, HIV/AIDS and environment. Factors enhancing and impeding effective mainstreaming are uncovered and this analysis forms the basis for a number of recommendations for improved policy implementation. In line with the most frequently identified obstacles, the recommendations primarily concern internal organisational factors at Sida.

Several suggested actions concern the policies themselves. It is argued that policy guidelines must include clarifications of key concepts, the establishment of clear goals, and manuals for implementation in order to become more useful to programme officers. The study also points to the need for a more coherent policy framework in which the mainstreaming issues are related both to one other as well as to other Sida policies and priorities.

All three evaluations are moreover emphatic that Sida must become better at integrating experiences and lessons learnt in its work. Thus there is a call for the establishments of more effective systems for follow-up and monitoring of each mainstreaming theme.



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