

Utrikesdepartementet

Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation in research for poverty reduction and sustainable development 2022–2028

1. Strategic objectives

The objective of Sweden's international development assistance is to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. Development cooperation is based on the principles of aid and development effectiveness, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

The strategy governs the use of funds under expenditure area 7, appropriation 1:1, appropriation item 32 Research cooperation in the appropriations directions for Sida for each budget year and the use of funds under expenditure area 7, appropriation 1:1, appropriation item 40 Development research – a share for the Swedish Research Council in appropriation directions for the Swedish Research Council for each budget year.

Activities will contribute to enhanced research that is of high scientific standard and relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development through mutually supportive initiatives in four complementary focus areas:

- **enhanced research capacity and sustainable research environments (Sida);**
- **enhanced global, regional and national research that is of relevance to the least developed countries and regions (Sida);**

- **enhanced impact of research that is of relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development (Sida); and**
- **enhanced Swedish research that is of high standard and of specific relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development (Swedish Research Council).**

2. Context

Research can contribute to identifying expressions of, and solutions to, poverty. Research promotes the development of analytical competence, critical thinking and well-informed public debates. Academic freedom is a cornerstone in protecting human rights and is crucial to a country's democratic development. New knowledge based on research can also contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Research is needed to acquire new and increased knowledge on, and improve the ability to manage, different development challenges in the areas of environment/climate, food security and health, democratisation processes, institution-building, gender equality, the economy and migration.

The strategy is being implemented at a time when academic freedom and the idea of a free and open knowledge-based society are being challenged by, among other things, authoritarian regimes, and when facts and science are questioned in, for example, public debates. Weak public funding in the least developed countries result in shortcomings in research capacity, with few researchers and weak structures for research and its outcomes.

Sweden has extensive experience of long-term development cooperation in research for poverty reduction and sustainable development and plays a unique role by emphasising the importance of locally anchored knowledge systems. A strong Swedish voice is needed on issues concerning democracy and human rights, academic freedom, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the great need for enhanced research initiatives in the areas of environment and climate. Swedish research cooperation in several partner countries is built on a system-based approach with the aim of developing universities into functioning research environments.

The ownership of universities and other research actors is key, as is the fact that researchers from the least developed countries and lower middle-

income countries can compete in international calls for research projects and collaborations. Sweden also insists that the least developed countries and lower middle-income countries must increase their domestic engagement and investments in research.

The starting point should be the ambition to establish collaborations based on equal contributions by Swedish researchers and researchers in the least developed countries, and certain lower middle-income countries. Swedish development research should promote values such as research ethics, democratic working methods, gender equality and equality through research and cooperation at global, regional and national level. Development research contributes to the internationalisation of Swedish research, Swedish universities, and higher education institutions, and builds the foundation for broader relations through research cooperation beyond aid. Development research in Sweden can also contribute to international development cooperation through enhanced platforms for exchange between research and policy.

The overall risks in research cooperation are that current and planned collaborations with publicly funded universities in partner countries are hampered by political repression, restrictions on academic freedom and politically and financially de-prioritised research in those countries. Additionally, there is a risk that other research funders will de- or re-prioritise initiatives in areas in which Sweden is engaged.

Corruption is both a risk and obstacle to development. Research-related risks particular to corruption include the distribution of research funds and nominations for appointments, or that senior researchers abuse their power over younger researchers by demanding sexual services.

3. Activities

Sida and the Swedish Research Council will carry out, monitor, and report on activities in accordance with the Government's guidelines for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategies (UD2017/21053). The guidelines state that activities must be actively directed towards achieving the objectives and that actual performance must be monitored based on those objectives. The annual strategy report will be comprehensive and include an account, analysis and assessment of the results of the activities in relation to the stated objectives. Performance

information will be used for decision-making, learning and accountability, and for ensuring transparency towards the public. Monitoring will produce reliable and useful performance information in both the short and long term by using both qualitative and quantitative information where possible. Performance monitoring will primarily establish whether activities have made a difference, in what way and for whom. Based on the existing conditions, monitoring will determine the extent to which development cooperation has made a difference. Sweden's development cooperation will be relevant and effective.

Sweden's development cooperation contributes to sustainable development based on the 2030 Agenda, the financing for development commitments in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The activities' contributions are relevant to all the 2030 Agenda's sustainable development goals (SDGs). Internationally agreed principles on aid and development effectiveness must be applied.

As a rule, Sida's activities will be carried out in countries and regions where the Government has adopted development cooperation strategies at bilateral and global level. Research cooperation in fragile states is encouraged, not least to strengthen universities as public institutions with a potentially favourable impact on democracy and social development. Sida can involve universities, institutions and researchers in Sweden within the strategy areas for which it is responsible. The Swedish Research Council's activities will contribute to strengthening development research in Sweden through support to individual researchers, and to collaborative projects between researchers in Sweden and researchers in the least developed countries, and in certain lower middle-income countries.

Synergies between various strategy objectives will be promoted. Synergies will also be sought with other strategies for development cooperation and other relevant activities. Sida and the Swedish Research Council will collaborate in all focus areas of the strategy, and with other research councils, actors and funders, including the EU. Implementation will be characterised by flexibility in all forms of cooperation and methods, including the use of innovative forms of funding and mobilisation of additional financial resources.

Swedish research and research cooperation should be a resource in efforts for broader relations in partner countries where Swedish research support and aid is being phased out. Collaboration between Sida, the Swedish Research Council and other research funders should aim to utilise previous initiatives and further develop research cooperation.

Enhanced research capacity and sustainable research environments (Sida)

Sida's activities will aim to develop research capacity in the long-term and enhance sustainable research environments, primarily in the least developed countries and regions.

Activities will be characterised by equal partnerships, local ownership, a long-term perspective and promotion of research systems. Support can be given to researchers, universities, research councils, organisations that focus on research and research support, ministries and to increased capacity for national and international exchanges.

The capacity of research education and research will be enhanced and include post-doctoral support at partner universities and organisations in the partner countries. Activities will also contribute to ensuring that more women can study at postgraduate level and conduct research. Giving researchers access to scientific journals, national and international research conferences, skills and infrastructures for interdisciplinary communication should be prioritised.

Activities in higher education at undergraduate level should be limited to research-oriented Master's programmes. Scientific publications that are the result of funding under this strategy should be generally available. Research data should be made available according to the principle 'as open as possible and as limited as necessary'. Support to and collaboration with national research councils and responsible authorities and government ministries are still key. The political dialogue on the importance of resources for research is particularly emphasised.

Enhanced global, regional and national research that is of relevance to the least developed countries and regions (Sida)

Activities will contribute to strengthening global, regional and national research that is of scientific standard and relevant to reducing poverty and sustainable development, primarily in the least developed countries and regions.

Research support should contribute to academic freedom, gender equality, scientific quality and relevance to development, and long-term planning and local ownership. Development research in a breadth of academic disciplines is important, as are multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary initiatives. Support will go towards both applied and basic research, and particularly promote strong and sustainable research environments that focus on cutting-edge research that is clearly relevant to development.

Enhanced impact of research that is of relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development (Sida)

The impact of research in partner countries must be enhanced. Activities should contribute to policy development, evidence-based decisions, research applications, innovations, education and public debates in line with development research results.

A key challenge is to promote innovation ecosystems, i.e. environments that strengthen research interaction with the surrounding community. Context-specific and flexible solutions that are based on strong local ownership are in demand. Both south-south and north-south collaborations should be included.

Activities should help enhance the interaction of universities with businesses, civil society and public administration. Increased understanding of innovation ecosystems and the capacity of research to fund and follow up initiatives by, for example, national research councils, etc. is essential. Activities should also contribute to enhanced capacity in research communication and scientific journalism as well as public demand and recipient capacity.

Strengthened Swedish research that is of high scientific standard and of specific relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development (Swedish Research Council)

Swedish Research Council activities will, in the long-term, support Swedish development research that is of high scientific standard, and particular relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in the least developed countries, and in certain lower middle-income countries.

The Swedish Research Council should analyse new opportunities for assisting development researchers early in their careers. Moreover, additional measures to strengthen research environments and other capacities in Swedish development research should be sought. Research cooperation with the least developed countries and certain lower middle-income countries should be made more equal than it currently is.

Inter- and multidisciplinary research, including challenges regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, may be included. Collaboration with other research funders is encouraged.

Activities should contribute to increasing the impact and use of development research, including through communication activities, increased use of research networks and developed methodology for improving the integration of research results in policy processes.

Activities will promote Swedish universities' and higher education institutions' engagement, capacity and expertise in development research.