

## Mainstreaming the Environment

### Does Sida conceptualize the linkages between the environment and poverty reduction in accordance with global norm?

According to previous evaluations, one of the principal reasons for why mainstreaming of the environment can be problematic may be lack of precision in conceptualizing the environment's value added in terms of poverty reduction. Yet, recent publications such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment try to rectify this lack of precision by specifying a number of central linkages between the environment and poverty reduction. This evaluation assesses to what extent the conceptualizations of poverty-environment linkages found within the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) correspond to this global norm on how such linkages ought to be conceptualized. Through a mixed methodological approach including a quantitative analysis of aid allocation, an analysis of policy documents, and semi-structured interviews at Sida headquarters and at one of the Swedish embassies, this SADEV evaluation demonstrates that the conceptualizations of poverty-environment linkages to a large extent is coherent with the global norm as well as coherent across different levels within Sida.

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The failure to properly recognize the linkages between the environment and poverty reduction has previously been put forward as a critical shortcoming in Swedish development cooperation as well as in development cooperation in general. If such linkages are conceptually unclear and if environmental aid is unable to effectively communicate its value added in terms of poverty reduction, environmental issues tend to be neglected, the argument goes. Following this logic, lack of precision and lack of coherence in the conceptualization of poverty-environment linkages has in fact been put forward as a potential explanation to why mainstreaming of the envi-

ronment in many cases has been problematic.

The overall objective of this evaluation is therefore to evaluate the external and internal coherence of the conceptualizations of poverty-environment linkages found within Sida. This is evaluated by comparing how poverty-environment linkages are conceptualized at different levels within Sida, and by comparing these conceptualizations with how poverty-environment linkages are conceptualized in the new international consensus – advocated by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and others – on how such linkages ought to be conceptualized.

## THE BASELINE – AN IDEAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

The central message in the ideal conceptualization put forward by for example the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is that the environment represents not only a set of problems but also a set of opportunities. The traditional do-no-harm approach should thus be avoided and environmental aid should not have a narrow focus on conservation and environmental protection only. When it comes to the quantitative analysis in this evaluation, this implies that if Swedish environmental aid is to be coherent with the ideal conceptualization, a large share of aid should have the environment as a principal or significant objective. Even more importantly, not only “traditional” environmental sectors should have the environment as a policy objective. As regards the qualitative analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interviews, if coherence is to be high, the documents and staff at Sida HQ as well as field personnel should sort the linkages between poverty and the environment in the categories found in the ideal conceptualization: *environment and health*, *environment and economic opportunity*, *environment and security*, and *environment and empowerment*. In addition, key reforms and responses should according to the ideal conceptualization be placed in the following categories: *institutions and governance*, *economics and incentives*, *social and behavioral responses*, *technological responses*, and *knowledge and cognitive responses*.

## THE RESULTS

The quantitative analysis based on data obtained from OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) shows that a large share of Swedish aid has the environment as either a significant or principal policy objective. This share is much larger than among other OECD donors. In addition, and importantly, there have been considerable changes in Swedish aid between 2001 and 2006. While “traditional” environmental sectors quite

naturally dominate among the sectors having the environment as either a significant or principal policy objective in both years, more “non-traditional” environmental sectors (such as industry, construction, health, trade policy and regulation) get a “policy flag” for having the environment as an objective in 2006 than in 2001. The quantitative investigation thus answers affirmatively to the question of whether the conceptual shift emphasizing that a large share of aid should have an environmental focus and that more sectors than the “traditional” environmental sectors should have the environment as a policy objective has penetrated Swedish development cooperation.

The analysis of Sida’s policy documents also indicates that the conceptualization of poverty-environment linkages to a large extent is coherent with the ideal conceptualization. In line with these results, interviews with staff at Sida HQ reveal that the conceptualizations of poverty-environment linkages found among staff at Sida HQ by and large are coherent with the linkages identified in the ideal conceptualization. Similarly, the interviews with field personnel at one of the Swedish embassies reveal far-reaching coherence. The interviews at Sida HQ and at a Swedish embassy thus show that the ideal conceptualization of poverty-environment linkages to a large extent has penetrated the conceptualization found among Sida personnel. Importantly, however, the respondents expressed some concerns over whether the awareness of the linkages between the environment and poverty reduction – as articulated in for example the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment – truly was common knowledge within the organization. For example, the respondents identified a risk that sectors not explicitly involved in environmental work still tended to fall back on a do-no-harm approach where the environment was considered an add-on rather than as an integral part of their work toward poverty reduction.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- SADEV's overall conclusion is that Sida to a large extent conceptualize poverty-environment linkages in coherence with the "global norm" of how such linkages ought to be conceptualized.
- The hypothesized explanation for why mainstreaming may be problematic – i.e. lack of conceptual clarity when it comes to how the environment contributes to poverty reduction – hence does not seem to hold true.

Given the results from this evaluation, there is no clear-cut justification for blaming poor performance of mainstreaming of the environment on lack of conceptual clarity or diverging views on how the environment contributes to poverty reduction. Yet, while environmental issues to a large extent seem to have proven their value added in terms of poverty reduction, the results from this evaluation indicate that the linkages between poverty and the environment in fact can be communicated even more strongly.

- This evaluation identifies a risk that sectors not explicitly involved in environmental work still tend to employ a do-no-harm approach where the environment is considered as an add-on rather than as a crucial input in the fight against poverty.
- There is thus still clearly some room for improvement when it comes to making sectors and personnel not explicitly focused on environmental issues recognize the linkages found in the ideal conceptualization.

Hence, although the conceptualizations of poverty-environment linkages found within Sida to a large extent correspond to the ideal conceptualization, the awareness of the ways in which the environment potentially contributes to poverty reduction could be raised even further. Proving and communicating the environment's value added in terms of poverty reduction thus remains a pedagogical challenge demanding continuous training and capacity development throughout the organization.

## SOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

This SADEV brief is based on *Mainstreaming the Environment. An evaluation of how Sida conceptualizes the linkages between the environment and poverty reduction*, SADEV Report 2009:2.

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