

Evaluation of Policy Dialogue as an Instrument in Swedish Development Cooperation – the case of Gender Equality

Policy dialogue plays a vital role in Swedish development cooperation. It serves a range of purposes and is used in many ways depending on the context and the stakeholders involved. To be successful, policy dialogue needs to be conducted in a way that ensures meaningful participation, be timely and coherent, be supported by a committed leadership and be complementary to project/programme support. Thus, policy dialogue requires both time and skills. The evaluation shows that Sida needs to clarify the concept and develop a tool box for staff to use when conducting dialogue.

These are some of the findings and recommendations from the evaluation of policy dialogue as an instrument in Swedish development cooperation – the case of gender equality. The evaluation was commissioned to get a better understanding of what constitutes successful policy dialogue on gender equality in different contexts and to contribute to the improvement of policy dialogue as an instrument in development cooperation. The evaluation covers the period of 2007-2013 and is based on three country case studies in Albania, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Guatemala to provide a more in-depth analysis of why, when, with whom and how policy dialogue for gender equality is done. Desk studies of key Sida documents and a mapping exercise including 11 countries to identify different ways of conducting policy dialogue in different contexts were also conducted.

Limited consensus on how to define policy dialogue

Stakeholders perceive policy dialogue in many ways. Most actors, including Sida, share a general belief that policy dialogue is a value-based negotiation process between two or more parties. It is widely recognised that Sida's policy dialogue is strongly connected to the promotion of Swedish priorities, such as gender equality, and that this influences resource allocation. Cooperation partners thus have a clear idea about what Swedish policy dialogue is promoting. But Sida has no clear definition of the concept.

Dialogue is formal and informal and used differently depending on purpose

The evaluation identifies two generic types of policy dialogue – the formal and informal policy dialogue. These types of dialogue are often used to complement each other and the evaluation concludes that both are needed to promote gender equality effectively.

The evaluation also identifies that depending on the main purpose of the policy dialogue, four different types of dialogue processes are most commonly used - dialogue for policy reform and development; dialogue for development cooperation agreements and implementation; dialogue for donor coordination; and dialogue for advocacy purposes.

Characteristics of successful policy dialogue

A successful policy dialogue is one that involves broad-based and meaningful participation of key stakeholders, includes a critical appraisal of different policy options based on the specific country context and one which contributes to changes in policy and practice. It should be timely, complementary to project/programme support, based on consistent key messages and supported by a committed leadership.

A successful policy dialogue from a gender equality perspective is one that leads to actual transformational change in women/men power relations and in access to resources and opportunities. The evaluation highlights three indicators of successful policy dialogue on gender equality – that it leads to increased women's participation in the reform process and public life; that it strengthens the capacity and status of national structures for gender; that it contributes to the implementation of gender equality legislation.

Support processes are important for effective policy dialogue

The evaluation found that support to policy related research and/or the capacity development of relevant actors involved in the policy dialogue are essential factors for the dialogue to reach its expected results. It could for example be to support the capacity development of civil society organisations thereby enhancing their ability to participate and/or influence policy reform processes. It could be to support statistics to highlight, say for example the low representation of women in public decision making. Or it could be to fund other types of research to provide evidence and to feed into ongoing policy reform.

Examples of achievements through policy dialogue

The evaluation concludes that Sweden frequently takes a lead role in policy dialogue on gender equality issues and has contributed to legislative reform processes to enhance gender equality in both Albania and Guatemala. Approaches used to achieve this include; to raise gender equality as an issue in negotiations of cooperation strategies and annual high-level meetings with government; to build alliances with other donors/multilateral organisations; and to make use of change agents to take the lead in the discussions. Support to enhance the opportunities for CSO's to engage in the policy dialogue has been an important component in order to ensure broad-based participation of key stakeholder in the reform processes.

For example, the evaluation suggests that in Guatemala, policy dialogue conducted by Sweden has contributed to two gender-specific laws being adopted as well as the development and adoption of a national gender policy and national plan on family violence and gender based violence (GBV). In addition and by complementing the use of policy dialogue with support to local CSO's, Sweden has contributed to an increased awareness of womens rights and increased participation and voice of women in community development councils.

In Albania, the evaluators conclude that the policy dialogue conducted by Sweden, various CSO's and OSCE has contributed to a higher degree of acceptance of women as politicians' and decision-makers. In 2008, the electoral code was revised to introduce a gender quota requiring political parties to have at least 30% women on their list of candidates for Parliament. Furthermore, Swedish policy dialogue together with support to UN women to promote gender responsive budgeting, have

contributed to a decision by the councils of Ministers to adopt “Gender mainstreaming in the medium term budgetary programme 2013-2015”.

As mentioned above, increased women participation in reform processes and public life is also recognised as an important indicator of successful policy dialogue on gender equality. In DRC, Sweden has supported extensive training on UN resolution 1325, which the evaluation suggests has contributed to enhanced opportunities for engagement in the discussions on the development of a national action plan on this topic. And in 2014, the Congolese army launched an action plan to tackle sexual violence. In addition, there has been extensive general training on gender equality and gender based violence directed to for example CSO’s and the justice and health sectors. The evaluation suggests that there are signs of enhanced participation of women groups in dialogue at community levels as well as in national level mainstream dialogue.

The evaluation further argues that in all three country case studies, there is evidence that Swedish policy dialogue has contributed to the endorsement, signing and/or ratification of international and regional declarations/agreements related to gender equality.

A systematic approach to policy dialogue has a greater chance to be successful

Sida lacks a consistent and systematic approach for how best to conduct policy dialogue. At the same time, the evaluation highlights the importance of a coherent and strategic approach to enable Sida to conduct policy dialogue more effectively. Thus, the evaluation concludes that there is a need for Sida to clarify and ‘unpack’ the concept of policy dialogue, and to develop a methods support on why, when, with whom and how policy dialogue can be conducted. A methods tool box can be a first step in providing staff with practical and hands-on support when and how they are to engage in policy dialogue.

Such a methods support should define the concept, map out different types and purposes of policy dialogue, highlight characteristics of what can be identified as successful policy dialogue as well as stress the importance of timing and backing up of a committed leadership. Gender focal points are also highlighted as essential in supporting staff to conduct policy dialogue on gender equality. And least but not last, the evaluation stresses the importance to recognise that it takes both time and skills to conduct policy dialogue.

For additional observations, conclusions, lessons and recommendations see the synthesis report at www.sida.se/publications.

The evaluation was commissioned by Sida and carried out by Dana Peebles (team leader), Jonas Lövkrona, Nadine Jubb, Dr Georg Ladj (QA) and Julia Schwarz (project manager), from Particip GmbH Consultancy firm between February 2014 and May 2015.

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You can download the entire evaluation under www.sida.se/publications

An inception report including the mapping of policy dialogue in 11 countries and three in-depth field study reports covering Albania, DRC and Guatemala are also available in Sida’s archive. If interested, please contact the Unit for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME).