

Sustainable business and development cooperation

An evaluation of the Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development, 2012-2018

The evaluation yields a generally favourable assessment of Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development (SLSD) as a highly relevant initiative for Sida, member companies and the implementation of Agenda 2030. The SLSD network has a unique position and membership in relation to the international dimensions of sustainable business and development cooperation that is unmatched by other initiatives. SLSD represents a novel way for Sida to engage with the private sector and the evaluation finds that Sida has been a competent development facilitator. To maintain momentum and generate effects beyond the network itself, SLSD needs to re-define its common objectives.

The purpose of the evaluation was to capture ‘the Swedish Leadership story’ and generate lessons learnt from this working methodology and Sida’s new role as a “development facilitator” and partnership broker for sustainable development.

SLSD made contributions to Agenda 2030 and showcased private-public partnerships

The evaluation found that SLSD was a highly relevant way to engage the private sector in influencing the formulation of Agenda 2030. Joint statements and commitments have been important effects of the network. It proved to be an important resource for the Swedish government during the negotiation process and amplified the voice of the Swedish private sector through its advocacy efforts, showcasing the relevance of private-public partnerships for sustainable development. The network launched an impressive advocacy effort in the run-up to Agenda 2030 that contributed to raising corruption as a critical issue for sustainability. The network’s priorities - anti-corruption, transparency, and accountable institutions - eventually came to feature in the SDGs.

A unique model for sustainable business that inspired others but concrete partnerships yet to materialize

There is evidence that SLSD has served as a model and inspiration for private and public sector initiatives within and outside Sweden. The network has facilitated contacts and opened doors to external international actors and global processes, normally beyond the reach of individual member companies. It has had interactions with other important SDG actors such as labour unions, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and Business Sweden, but concrete partnerships have not been formed.

Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development (SLSD) was founded by Sida and CEOs from some of Sweden’s leading companies in 2013. The initiative came out of two priorities of the Swedish government; to ensure a broad consultative process leading up to defining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to improve the relationship with the private sector and a more proactive role for Swedish companies in a development assistance context that would direct more resources towards ending poverty.

The network has not contributed to developing the concept of ‘public private development partnership’ in a significant way, or generated concrete joint initiatives and collaborative models at country level. This is likely to have contributed to the feeling among many network members that the network has not produced concrete results. The evaluation points to untapped potentials of private-public partnerships at developing country level, joint initiatives, studies and advocacy efforts or to share practices learnt from the network that contribute to revenue or reduce costs in the core business of the members.

Joint collaboration at country level constrained by capacity bottlenecks

The evaluation finds that there is scope for establishing partnerships or alliances with private and public actors, including other development agencies that have platforms that engage with the private sector. Further, it was identified that there are insufficient incentives and capacity bottlenecks at country level within both Sida and the companies, which impede opportunities for joint action and collaboration. The evaluation presents different ways that Sida staff, embassy trade promoters and Swedish companies could explore to join forces at country level to address the SDGs jointly.

Individual capacity development but no evidence for changes in organizational practices

SLSD has been a valued forum for learning, exchange and partnerships on topics related to Agenda 2030. However, capacity development within the network has mainly been at an individual level and there is little evidence that SLSD has discernibly changed core business and organizational practices of Swedish companies or Sida, leveraged private sector resources for development, let alone achieved tangible results in terms of reducing poverty. These all constitute formidable tasks, but there are expectations among network members and Sida that the network should deliver such results. Policies and decisions taken by companies may have been influenced by their membership in SLSD, but if so it is one of many factors influencing their sustainability efforts, making any contribution difficult to measure and to attribute to the network. To remain relevant and maintain interest, the evaluation finds that the network needs to address the challenges.

Sida is a competent development facilitator but structural adaptations needed for a fully enabling environment

Apart from SLSD being an innovative way for Sida to engage with the private sector, Sida has also taken on a new role as ‘development facilitator’, a development change agent, which has required the organisation to deliver in ways that cannot be measured through financial disbursements. This role challenges the idea that Sida is primarily a funding agency, which currently pervades Sida’s structures, systems, and organisational culture. This has been highly demanding, involving time-consuming bureaucratic procedures. Even so, the evaluation found that Sida has served as a competent, transparent, and highly responsive facilitator for the network. SLSD has shown that it is possible for Sida to come a long way as development facilitator within Sida’s traditional structures with dedicated leadership and staff, but that Sida’s organisation needs to be adapted to new ways

Agenda 2030 for sustainable development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. It comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a call for action by all countries in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.
Source: www.un.org

of working in order to provide a fully enabling environment for a network facilitator function. This includes long-term commitment and buy-in from the top, and to clearly communicate Sida's own priorities within the partnership.

Common objectives needed for SLSD to reach its full potential

An adaptive approach has characterized the network's direction. As the network consolidated itself after the adoption of Agenda 2030 in 2015, it jointly developed and agreed upon a short and basic framework for its purpose and objectives from 2017 to 2020. However, it is also evident that the network is struggling to find direction. There is a need to define common intermediary objectives that can deliver concrete results in the eyes of members in order to increase commitment and engagement from member representatives. Given the diversity of interests within the network, the disparity in perceptions of what constitutes 'concrete' results and the limited capacity of member representatives, this would require a formal governance structure and firmer leadership from Sida to enable stronger priority setting and strategic thinking. Any future focus needs to reflect the international dimensions of sustainable business and policy-making and the link to Swedish development cooperation which are the unique added value of the network.

The SLSD network is facilitated by Sida and composed of 26 large, influential, well-resourced Swedish rooted companies with interests in developing countries and a sustainability track record; three Swedish expert organisations and a Swedish development finance institution. The members are: ABB SWEDEN, ASTRA ZENECA, ATLAS COPCO, AXEL JOHNSON, ELEKTA, ERICSSON, FÖRETAGARNA, H&M, ICA, IKEA, INDISKA, KF, LINDEK, LÖFBERGS, RATOS, SANDVIK, SCANIA, SEB, SPP, SSAB, SYSTEMBOLAGET, TELE2, TELIA, TETRA LAVAL, UNILEVER, VOLVO, Stockholm Environmental Institute, Stockholm International Water Institute, Stockholm Resilience Centre and Swedfund.

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The evaluation was commissioned by Sida. It was carried out by an evaluation team from NIRAS between March and August 2018. The evaluation team included Cecilia M Ljungman (team leader), Jens Andersson, Jonas Norén, Emelie Pellby and Niels Dabelstein. The evaluation can be downloaded from www.sida.se/publications