

Normative dialogue addresses Swedish values and priorities and is part of Sida's global advocacy work to get better development results to reduce poverty and promote a human rights based approach, gender equality, conflict prevention and the integration of the environment and climate change perspective. This brief is an example of a normative dialogue on gender equality between Sweden (Sida and Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the UN organisation OCHA.

BACKGROUND

UN organisations' have unique roles as convener and platforms for advancing the global agenda in several thematic and geographical areas prioritized in Swedish development cooperation. The cooperation with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA¹) is part of Sida's humanitarian strategy. The support from Sweden is provided through non-earmarked funding and supported through normative dialogue, coordinated between Sida and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

It has been identified that the gender equality perspective could be dealt with in a more systematic way within the humanitarian assistance work. OCHA was identified as an important entry point where these issues could be raised, and results achieved. However, it soon became evident that gender equality work at OCHA was ad hoc based and with limited resources. With the arrival of a new Senior Gender Adviser² at OCHA, some two years ago, there was a dedicated resource/gender expert who was highly motivated and committed to drive the gender equality agenda forward.

DIALOGUE PROCESS

Sweden's formal dialogue with OCHA takes place at many levels, and in many formats³ both in New York and in Geneva, as well as at capital level, where the Foreign Ministry and Sida participate. In addition, the Missions in New York and Geneva have a virtually, on a daily basis contact with OCHA staff.

The humanitarian advisor and the Sida representative at the Permanent Mission in New York meet with OCHA colleagues regularly both at formal and informal meetings. The MFA and Sida are in regular contact on ongoing OCHA issues, and in the run-up to high-level meetings and consultations.

Generally, the donors are the ones driving the issue, both with OCHA and other UN organisations. During the OCHA donor group meetings, Sweden is consistently driving gender equality issues in cooperation with other "gender champion" donors.

MAIN RESULTS

One of the main achievements has been that gender has been kept as one of the priority issues on the agenda, owing to the dialogue efforts made by Sweden, being an advocate and a gender champion in the OCHA donor support group. As the Senior Gender Adviser at OCHA put it "*the progress made in OCHA and the wider humanitarian system on gender is thanks to donors like Sida for prioritising and pushing this agenda*".

Due to Team Sweden's efforts and dialogue work and that of other donors that put gender equality high on the agenda (such as Finland), UN Women have become more engaged in the Interagency Steering Committee, and has been recommended to become a standing member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)⁴, a strategic forum where gender equality agenda can be pushed more systematically. OCHA has updated its Policy Instruction on Gender

1 OCHA is mandated by the UN General Assembly to manage the coordination of the international humanitarian system

2 Funding provided by Finland

3 Bilateral, Nordic, donors/ODSG, multilateral/UN meetings

4 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is an inter-agency forum of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners founded in 1992, to strengthen humanitarian assistance

Equality that is more strategic, feminist informed, and clear on its priorities – driving more robust gender analysis, addressing gender based violence, and promoting women’s meaningful participation in decision making. It also commissioned the first ever system wide evaluation on women and girls “Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG)” specifically examining the progress made on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in emergencies. The evaluation points out the needs to allocate more human and financial resources to be able to work more systematically and long-term with gender equality, something that has been pointed out by Sida as well.

Due to Sweden’s and other donor dialogue, UN Women have become a standing member of the Interagency Steering Committee, a strategic forum where the gender equality agenda can be pushed more systematically.

OCHA has developed a new gender policy and commissioned the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE), to specifically look at Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) and the progress made so far.⁵ The evaluation points out the needs to allocate more human and financial resources to be able to work more systematically and long-term with gender equality.

The Gender with Age Marker (GAM) is a tool that aims at improving the quality of humanitarian aid actions by fostering assistance that is more sensitive to the differentiated needs and capacities of women, girls, boys and men. Through Sweden’s dialogue with OCHA, the use of GAM has been made obligatory in their contributions and they ask partner organisations to apply GAM in their planning processes.

⁵ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-iahe-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-geewg>

KEY TAKE AWAY

The cooperation between Sida and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has contributed towards these main achievements, where the different roles and expertise come into play and bring value to the dialogue.

It is imperative to have a solid understanding of the organisation with which you plan to initiate the dialogue and to become familiar with their policies and frameworks, planning processes and capacities, so that the input provided is suitable to their specific situation and roles. You also need to be realistic in what can be achieved at different levels of the organisation and that knowledge within the organisation can vary greatly.

It is furthermore important to combine the normative dialogue with concrete initiatives, whether it is support to the development of a gender policy or tools (such as GAM), or other agreements. It is also essential to follow up on the normative dialogue and not to miss out on the critical issues that have been raised and agreed. For this to materialize, one should consider:

- Setting reasonable milestones and specific expectations with dialogue partners. These need to be followed up and results documented.
- In the case of OCHA, follow up on the findings and recommendations from the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) that was conducted, in order to monitor progress on gender equality.

For more information contact Lena Karlsson, lena.karlsson@sida.se or Maria Liungman, maria.liungman@sida.se